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THE FABRIC OF THE LOOM

BY
MARY S. WATTS

LUTHER NICHOLS
BOARDMAN FAMILY
THE RISE OF JENNIE CUSHING
VAN CLEVE
THE HOUSE OF RIMMON
THE LEGACY
FROM FATHER TO SON
THREE SHORT PLAYS
THE NOON-MARK
NATHAN BURKE
THE RUDDER

The Fabric of the Loom

BY
MARY S. WATTS

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THE FABRIC OF THE LOOM

I

THE General Jackson had a rather meagre passenger-list for a vessel returning from Europe toward the close of the tourist season, and leaving Cherbourg headed almost at once into heavy weather that reduced the population about the decks deplorably. But now, after forty hours or so, the sun had come out, the air was perceptibly kinder, the big liner pushed along upon a fairly even keel. There began to be some activity among the chairs, and the steward's tray of *bouillon* had an intrepid patron here and there; people of hitherto unsuspected existence, or in toilettes that had suffered so emphatic a sea-change as to render the wearers unrecognizable as the smart and scrupulous travelers originally embarked turned up; a handful of children who had come through the ordeal perfectly undamaged rioted about happy in the dreamlike relaxation of discipline.

The tall, English-looking man with the mustache, the high nose and the monocle, paced up and down with the other somewhat heavy-set one who had the air of being prosperously in business; and there was a tentative gayety among the young girls, a slightly boastful parade of young men. Mrs. Stevens, swathed and reclining, looked down along the file of other swathed and reclining figures with tired yet alert eyes, awaiting the familiar scenes and experiences of ocean travel with her own equally familiar philosophy. It was ten years since her last trip, but she told herself that nothing had changed; she might have been voyaging incessantly all this while like the *Flying Dutchman*; ships and passengers on an Atlantic crossing seemed to belong to what the Darwinians called an established type; she herself belonged to it! That last time there had been a widow going to Europe with her little girl in order, frankly, to live and bring up the child and educate her where living and bringing up and education cost less; nowadays the widow was ten years older, but otherwise invincibly the same. Europe could not obliterate the stamp of Americanism upon her even after so long a time any more than it could from these flying visitors. She found that she

could place them, every one, at a glance, and did not doubt that she could be placed by them in turn. With Natalie, she mused, it might be different; a certain uneasiness beset her to observe against her will sundry contrasts between her daughter and these other girls. They were so definitely American, whereas Natalie with her polyglot tongue and her alien associations might be almost anything; the speech—at least the vernacular—of her native country was probably the only one at which she was inept; she barely remembered the big, noisy, sooty, vigorous mid-Western city that Mrs. Stevens always called home, and what she did remember bore no relation to those outstanding and eminently American characteristics of size and dirt and strength. Suburban gardens, houses of spacious comfort, dancing-school on Saturday afternoons, angelic ice-cream sodas partaken of in marble and many-colored palaces that people referred to as the drug-store—these must be the sum of Natalie's recollections of the land of her birth. Mrs. Stevens smiled involuntarily; the smile brightened as she caught some one's eye, and shifted her position with an inviting gesture to make room for him.

"Well, Dick?"

The young man—he seemed young to Mrs. Stevens, although he must have been, in fact, upward of thirty-five, and his thick, dark hair was graying at the temples—came and took her hand and greeted her with a very charming and convincing enthusiasm. "Cousin Judith! Are you all right now? Why, that's splendid! The beautiful thing about it—the *only* beautiful thing!—is that it won't come again, you know, once you're over it. It's a matter of making up your mind——"

"I've heard all that before—at least it has a familiar sound," said Mrs. Stevens, tranquilly humorous. "The spirit is willing but the flesh is likely to be disastrously weak. A person of my years and experience refuses to be told anything about seasickness, Dick. Sit down here and talk about something else. Have you seen Natalie anywhere around?"

Dick laughed and sat down as he was bid on the foot-rest of her chair, and said no, he hadn't seen Natalie yet this morning. "But I daresay she's somewhere with Marian Macready. They rediscovered each other last night at dinner when both of them made positively their first appear-

ance upon this stage. Rather nice they made friends at once."

"Why, they've always known each other—in a sort of casual, off-and-on way, to be sure. Ever since I had Natalie in that English school at Cannes. The Macreadys were over that year to spend the winter, and I told them about the place, so they put Marian there, too. Of course, people from home, the Macreadys and everybody else, are coming and going all the time, and hardly ever stay more than a season anywhere, but I've never lost sight of any of them. One can't drop out utterly, you know. I couldn't anyhow, on Marian's account. I always meant to come home when she was old enough. I want her to have some social experience at home. I had such a beautiful time when I was her age and came out, and went to all the teas and parties and all that. It has always seemed to me as if I ought to make a special effort to keep from being forgotten. It's so important for a girl—her first year in society—the right sort of people, you know——" Unconsciously she had been speaking with increasing earnestness, following up a train of thought that had occupied her a good deal of late, and now she halted on a questioning inflection, looking to

him deprecatingly yet with visible confidence in his understanding these half related and not too coherent statements; and he justified her by a nod of ready comprehension.

"Yes, of course. I see."

"I'm afraid, though, that it's going to be difficult for her after all, Dick. I was just thinking as you came along that she is alarmingly unlike the rest of the girls I've seen so far on board—excepting Marian, of course. It makes me a little anxious about the kind of time she's going to have, you know."

"Oh, now, Cousin Judith, you don't need to worry, Natalie will get along all right. Even if she wasn't attractive otherwise, a pretty girl is always a pretty girl."

"Yes, but she can't afford to be *different*. That won't do somehow," Mrs. Stevens insisted. Then she added with a smile and glance touched with pleasant shrewdness: "Very diplomatic, Richard! But Natalie isn't wonderfully pretty, you know that as well as I do. And at home it's simply running over with pretty girls, you know that, too!"

He smiled with her, a trifle confused. "Well, I'm a true patriot and I think our girls are hard

to beat," he admitted stoutly. "But Natalie's one of them after all, and she won't be out of the running, by any means."

Mrs. Stevens' comment on this was only a shrug, a little gesture. Their eyes strayed along the deck, encountering the spectacle of the somewhat heavy-set man in his unostentatiously well-cut clothes advancing in company with a lady likewise unostentatiously modish, but not at all heavy, quite the reverse. Against the background of lacklustre convalescents she appeared with a piquant and vivacious distinction, perhaps inherent, perhaps contributed temporarily by her undimmed brunette coloring, her lithe and sure bearing as of a sort of marine Diana. They came abreast of Mrs. Stevens' chair, and Dick got up, and the heavy man paused, raising his cap, heavily performing an introduction. "Anita, this 's Mr. Meryon I was telling you about." He made cloudy references to a previous acquaintance and a meeting in the smoking-room, and wound up with: "My wife, Dick."

Mr. Meryon murmured "Mrs. Lee!" and bowed, looking at her meanwhile with a boyish attention and steadiness; then he introduced the Lee couple to "My cousin, Mrs. Charles Stevens."

There were some perfunctory amenities; the Lees sauntered on, and Mrs. Stevens gazed after them with an interest more or less foreign to her delicate, experienced face which most of the time wore the expression of having seen everything and everybody in the world.

"Who *are* those people, Dick? From home? He spoke as if he knew you already, and I seem to remember—I feel as if I ought to know——" She pondered, contracting her brows, and Dick responded promptly that of course she knew.

"That's Ledyard Lee. *You* remember. One of our Lees at home. You knew all the Ledyards, too, didn't you? Well, this is——"

Her exclamation of enlightenment and assent interrupted him. "Why, of *course!* *Those* Lees—*our* Lees! I didn't connect the name at once with *them*, but of *course!* There was only that one family of Lees with us—that anybody knew, I mean. This one must be a son of Julia Ledyard's. She was the oldest of the Ledyard girls—oh, a great deal older than I am——"

"Well, I should think so! Led's my age, about."

"He looks like his mother as I remember her.

Julia was a large, dumpy, slow sort of girl. Very nice, of course; the Ledyards were nice people. But Julia was rather inanimate——”

“So’s Led. Maybe that’s what reminded you. Nothing the matter with him, you know, he’s all right, only slow. Enough enterprise to get married, however. They’ve been having a six-months honeymoon in Europe, he told me.”

Mrs. Stevens remarked that the bride seemed to be a rather striking personality. Then, after a moment of meditative survey of the horizon, she irrelevantly inquired: “Mr. Lee—I mean old Mr. James Lee, this one’s father—left quite a large fortune, didn’t he?”

“Oh, yes, he’d made a great deal of money before the war, and everything soared in price so at that time that it must have come in by the ton! He had Led in the business with him, but I think only nominally, as you might say. I don’t think the old man ever let Led do much, and now he doesn’t do anything—doesn’t have to!” Mr. Meryon heaved a sigh of burlesque resignation, and felt for his cigarettes. “And observe how an able, ambitious professional man whom I’m too modest to name has to work! Life is like that! That’s what they always make somebody say in

the last act of these plays you see so many of, right now. The curtain comes down on a miserable situation with everybody going to the dogs, except the fellow who has to say: "*Life is like that*"—he's there already! It's really distressing to think what life is like in the theatre district!"

"Oh, don't go, Dick. I don't mind your smoking."

"Why, that's nice of you, but it might blow across some of these ladies who *would* mind. Anything I can bring you or do for you, Cousin Judith?"

His cousin looked at him with eyes in which some imaginative observer might have detected a flicker of amused pride. "Oh, American man!" she ejaculated, to his open astonishment. "Don't mind me, Dick, I'm probably beginning to dodder. If you happen to fall in with Natalie you might gently hint to her where I am. That's all I want, thank you."

He went off; and it was not until he was out of sight that Mrs. Stevens moved with a jerk and an inward exclamation of annoyance. "There, I never said a word about his wife! I didn't even ask where she was or why she didn't come with him; I forgot her completely! I must be begin-

ning to dodder, sure enough!" she thought ruefully.

The next chair opened a conversation, and they had got as far as Sir Oliver Lodge and spiritual possibilities when the Englishman came by, cigar, monocle, baggy tweeds and all, impassively saluting her; and her new acquaintance abandoned the problems of continued existence after death to follow his progress speculatively. "That's one of those titled people," she said, turning the same eye of inspection and evaluation upon Mrs. Stevens. "They've got a deck-suite. Who was he bowing to, did you notice?"

"I thought he was bowing to me," said Mrs. Stevens simply.

"Oh! Folks in England are usually so cool and distant you're surprised when they acknowledge to knowing anybody. Of course everybody has different ways and thinks their own are the best. I always say, well, I'm an American, and I always go right up and talk to anybody, and if they don't like it, I can't help it. That's *real* democracy, don't you think so?"

Mrs. Stevens uttered a gentle little sound of indeterminate meaning; but her manner was so pleasantly receptive that the other went on con-

fidingly, warming to the subject: "I expect that's what makes foreigners like us so much, our being so ready to make friends, you know—and then they're all after our money, of course. Well, I don't know that you can blame them exactly, when you see the awful way they live, and they can't help noticing how much better off and more progressive we are. Sanitary plumbing, you know, and everything. And for that matter it's only human nature to take advantage of us when we're so easy. It's partly our own fault, really, because we all go to Europe expecting to get skinned, and it would be funny if they didn't skin us, seeing us all ready for it. At that, things are cheaper than they are at home. And I always think, oh, well, we're over here for a good time, anyhow, and what's the money for? We can't take it with us when we go for good, that's one sure thing! But it's only Americans that feel that way; the English wouldn't for one minute. That's why they can always tell English from Americans, I guess." She was silent for a moment, contemplating this phenomenon, and then asked with rising curiosity: "Who is he? The one with the title, I mean."

"The name is Sloane-Macready, but——"

"Oh! Well, what would you call him to his face? Is he one of those *sirs*? Sir Macready?"

"Why—er—no. There isn't any title. That is——"

"Oh, just plain Mr. Macready, then?"

"Yes, plain Mr. Macready," said Mrs. Stevens, with another engaging smile. "I believe he was a colonel during the war, but they really don't bother much about titles, you know—not so much as we do, I sometimes think."

"Oh!" And now her companion's regard was charged faintly with suspicion. "This isn't your first trip, I expect."

"The first for a good while," Mrs. Stevens explained amiably. "I have been living in Europe since before the war."

"Oh, that's how you seem to know so much about it. Well, it's interesting, but I don't believe I could stand it to *live* there. Seeing it for two or three months is all right. I wouldn't be without the experience for anything, but I wouldn't want to live there. That's what everybody I know always says, when they come back; they wouldn't *live* there. It's got so nowadays that everybody feels it's a kind of duty to go once anyhow just to see it; it's so educational, you know.

We've had some splendid papers in our Women's Club about it—people who've been and others who haven't. One of the best was by a member who's never traveled at all to speak of—never even been to New York except once in her whole life! But of course she's a very brainy, brilliant woman, reads constantly and keeps up with everything. She wrote on "Feminism in French social and political life." It sounds kind of deep, but she treated it perfectly wonderfully, so that you could follow everything she said, and it was just as *clear*. Everybody said afterward that hers was *the* paper of the year."

Mrs. Stevens expressed due admiration. "And to think she has never been in France! She knows the language, though, undoubtedly."

"Oh, my, no! Hardly anybody does at home; there aren't any French books in the Library. No, Mrs. Swayble is just naturally bright. I often say to her it's wonderful how much she gets out of life. And everything to contend with, absolutely *everything*! Three children, and her husband never has done well in business——"

She talked on; and in the meanwhile, Mr. Richard Meryon, on a roundabout stroll toward the smoking-room, though keeping only a sort of de-

sultory lookout for her, actually did stumble upon his younger cousin with Miss Macready, established in a sheltered corner aft, under the lee of a lifeboat. There was a long, lean, straight young fellow with them whose face he recognized, and it presently developed that the name of this latter personage was Harkness.

"I don't believe you remember me, Mr. Meryon," he said with a rather pleasing and becoming diffidence. "I'm at the Embassy. I saw you there the other day."

"He belongs there," said Natalie, by way of further explanation. "It is a secretary job. What are you laughing at?" She divided a glance sparkling with distrust between the two men. "You told me that is what they called it in the States," she accused young Harkness hotly, and without knowing it, as was evident, slipped into rapid French. "*Ah ça! Vous m'avez joué alors!*" Her dark eyes snapped, she moved a slim, wiry hand, tapped a high-heeled foot ominously. It was not ugly, only startling like the sudden, graceful misbehavior of a spirited horse at the cracking of a whip.

"No, no, that's all right, Natalie," Meryon hurried to say among the other man's urgent excul-

pations. "‘Job’ is right. That’s exactly what they call it in the States."

"I wasn't playing any trick on you. That wouldn't be my notion of fun," Mr. Harkness said with some severity. Neither of them, however, quite dared to confess that her pronunciation of the word, somewhat as if it were spelled "chub," had moved a smile in spite of him. It crossed Dick Meryon's mind, observing the girl, that her mother's intuitions were disturbingly correct, and he felt a twinge of the same forebodings. There was no blinking the fact that Natalie *was* different. Her speech, fluent as it was, lacked conspicuously the flavor of the soil; it was touched with an accent pretty but unnatural, and ironically enough, it was too careful! The very style of her dress, if authorized by the Rue de la Paix, still exhibited a studied Gallic ideal of propriety for young girls; Fifth Avenue would not disown it, but would never dream of copying it, as even the untutored masculine eye could discern. Marian Macready, who was half English and had had the same sort of hybrid upbringing, nevertheless produced no such exotic impression; she had the assured mien of the American girl, and Natalie, though not awkward

or self-conscious, seemed oddly immature in comparison.

"I suppose you don't remember much about home, Natalie?" he asked abruptly.

She shook her head with a small, mock doleful grimace which of itself was a betrayal, he thought, watching her. "Very little, and it is all a jumble. Mother says my nationality will come back to me little by little. She is afraid she will feel strange at first, she herself. Lately she has been trying to tell me some details, to—to put me against. Is that right?" She looked at them appealingly, but this time herself led the laughter which accompanied at first their perplexity, then Jack Harkness' sudden illumination.

"To put you next, hey?"

"Ah, yes! Put me next! That is it!" said Natalie in delight. But Mr. Meryon interposed serious counsel.

"You mustn't say that, though. That's not good slang. It's—it's——" And here Richard, though he was a thorough American, found himself to his own surprise halted by shades of meaning that escaped definition. Marian came to the rescue more competently than would have been expected of her, somehow.

"It's just *common*, that's all!" she said in a tone which must have enlightened more than the words, for the other girl understood at once.

"Oh! Well, I have to be told. I heard some one say it, here on the boat, but I did not know. I shall have so much to learn," she said wistfully. "And it is going to be hard because I do not like people to laugh. French people do not laugh when one makes a mistake, or when one says the wrong thing. So I am not used to it."

"That's so!" said Jack, honestly. "They're awfully nice about that. They never move a muscle even when you're making the worst possible hash of what you're trying to say. They either politely help you out, or politely act as if you spoke the language like a native, and as if everything you did were all right, no matter how contrary to their conventions. It makes everything a good deal easier for a stranger right from the start. Did for me, anyhow. I like them," he finished expansively.

"How long have you been over?"

"I came with the troops," said Jack with that defeating reticence universal among the members of the Expeditionary Force from whom oxen

and wain-ropes could never drag a word about their martial experiences. The older man looked at him not without envy.

"I never got over," he said in brief regret.

By dinner-time the ocean had accommodately flattened down to such a stage as to put heart into the veriest weaklings. Everybody turned out in force upon the first notes of the bugle, and there was a notable recrudescence of interest in coiffures and appearances in general. Mrs. Lee came to table in a sea-going costume that hit the perfect mean between what Marian Macready called "plain sports and dress sports," surveying it with acute appreciation, though she herself had on an equally satisfactory confection from some London tailoring studio. Natalie wore one of her "simplicities," to quote again, but from a different source, that is to say, the French dress-maker who conceived the straight little frock in subdued coloring with a frugal garniture of fine needlework to be the absolute expression of youthfulness and girlishness. Mr. Harkness, by an unblushing bargain with the chief steward, had got himself transferred to the Stevens table, where Mr. Meryon was already established in right of his relationship; his flying trip to Europe

had concluded with a week in Paris with them, and they sailed as a family party.

"I drew a seat with a lady professor who's been over getting a degree or something at the Sorbonne," Jack confided to them. "The others were that Methodist missionary that's coming back from Armenia, and a hides-and-tallow fellow from the Argentine. Mrs. Hides-and-Tallow hasn't been coming to the dining-room, but she's down to-night. At first the steward said he couldn't change me, but after he'd looked them over, he relented. It was only common humanity." His glance roved casually about the room. "I think the Lees and Macreadys arranged to sit together in the beginning."

Mrs. Stevens with her smile intimated that it must require some daring to seek the company of a honeymooning couple.

"Oh, the moon is probably waning by this time," Dick said. He looked across to the other table whence Mrs. Lee, catching his eye, sent him a bright, passing glance like the careless flashing of a sword. "She certainly is out of the ordinary," he said, somehow a little taken aback, feeling all at once a need to explain or be vindicated. What was the matter with her, he thought

almost angrily; he had not been staring, making either her or himself conspicuous. And aloud: "I don't mean pretty, but—now Mrs. Sloane-Macready has always been a beauty and is still, and Marian isn't far behind her, but Mrs. Lee is—that is, she seems——"

"Quite torch-like! Oh, yes," said Mrs. Stevens, obligingly, but not too pointedly patching out his hesitation. "Who was she, by the way? One of our girls?"

"No, some Cleveland or Pittsburgh family, I believe. She visited at home, though, some boarding-school acquaintance, and that was when Ledyard Lee met her, I heard him say."

"Cecilia probably knows her, then," Mrs. Stevens said, bringing in his wife's name with some private trepidation. But, as with her worldly-wise acumen she had begun to suspect, Dick had not noticed or had forgotten her past negligence about Cecilia. "I shouldn't wonder," was all he said.

At the other table Mrs. Macready was asking her daughter what Natalie Stevens was like. "The Meryons, her mother's people, were all nice, and Judith used to be quite attractive as a girl," she said. "I think her immediate family are all

gone now. This Mr. Meryon is only a cousin, isn't he?"

Mr. Lee momentarily and not without some mental effort removed his attention from the file of sole to remark seriously that Dick Meryon was all right. He appeared to be on the brink of other utterances, but Marian intervened, answering her mother, and he went back to the sole undisturbed as if more or less accustomed to getting things half said and to accepting interruptions unresentfully.

"Oh, Natalie's *dear*—just the same as ever. It's a little funny, you know, the things she says, bringing them out in English. It rather takes you by surprise. You wouldn't think anything of it if she were really foreign, but American! It sounds so funny. You have to be careful, though; sometimes she flies out like everything, if you laugh, and then again she doesn't seem to mind at all—and she's awfully sorry afterward. She plays her violin still, did you know? She's been studying all this while."

"Really? Oh, I remember now she was always running around with her violin case going to her lessons that winter we spent in Munich. I sup-

pose she plays very well by this time. She ought to."

"I don't know. But they've been after her already for the concert."

"A violinist? That explains the fits of temper," said Mrs. Lee. "But do we have to have the concert? Oh, dear! I was in hopes we'd escape. That's what we all get for coming on one of these poky old boats."

Mr. Sloane-Macready focussed the monocle on her thoughtfully. "It isn't half bad," he observed in accents upon which twenty years' residence in America with an American wife and family had had no effect; they were as richly British as if he had never left his native island. Mr. Francis George Lyell Sloane-Macready was somewhere in the neighborhood of fifty-five; he had been successively at Eton, at Cambridge, an officer in a crack regiment of the Guards, a polo-player, a big-game hunter of renown, and the husband of the American heiress, Miss Marian Meigs. Setting apart these achievements, Francis George had never done a thing in his life until the outbreak of the war, whereupon, though well over age, he had without an instant's delay or hesitation, offered himself for military service, had

been accepted and had fought through the entire four years, returning to civil life at the end with a D. S. O. and a permanently crippled but still usable hand acquired at Vimy Ridge about the middle of the struggle. It annoyed him greatly that he was unable to make a shot at billiards without showing this injury, which he considered very bad form and the sort of thing that was not "done." Numbers of Americans would have been offended by his manners, his speech, his ways of thought, and larger numbers would have set him down for worthless; perhaps they would have been right. He had friends, however; and the look he cast around the dining-room of the *General Jackson* unconsciously expressed a democratic spirit not wholly unworthy. "They do us very well," was his opinion. "And the concerts are often rather jolly."

Mrs. Lee laughed and told him he was a good sport. "I'm such a poor sailor, you know, that's the reason I like a big, fast boat so as to get the crossing over as quickly as possible." She addressed Marian. "I thought you said Miss Stevens was going to come out this winter."

"Well, she is. That's what they're coming home for."

"But how about the violin? She can't be a débutante and a violinist too, and do herself justice either way. Isn't she going to have a musical career? Or does she think the career can wait?"

"Why, I don't believe Natalie's thought anything about it one way or the other. She isn't a bit like an American girl, you know. She seems to expect her mother to decide everything," said Marian so innocently that all her elders began to laugh—all except Mr. Lee, that is, who looked from one to another puzzled, and asked what was the joke?

The talk must have aroused Mr. Macready's interest, notwithstanding his air of phlegmatic indifference; for later, when the two parties drew together in the lounge, he established himself opposite Natalie, fixed his monocle, and remarked: "I understand this is your first visit to the States. At least since you were small, eh?"

She said yes, flushing, awaiting his next words warily, with a certain appearance of defensive preparation.

"Well—aw—it's a good deal different over there, y'know. You're likely to find it confusing. About tipping, for example. Mustn't tip the conductor chap on the railroad or the tram."

"Three strong cheers!" said Jack. "He's the only man you don't tip."

"It isn't done," Francis George explained seriously. "Thought I'd tell you because that's one of the things one doesn't always get told, y'know, eh? And about your luggage; it's extraordinary! You pay the fellows, and they take it away, and you never see it again until you're home. Then it turns up perfectly all right! Nobody ever carries anything but a bag of over-night clothes, and the nigger fellow on the railway coach attends to that for you."

"You tip *him*, all right!" said Jack.

Mr. Macready, after an instant of studious concentration, collected and volunteered more details. "Hardly any of 'em say 'sir' or 'madame'—I mean taxi-drivers and porters and all that, y'know. They call a man 'cap,' and they say 'missus' or 'sister' to *you*."

"'Sister'!" Natalie echoed helplessly, with suspicious eyes questioning the rest of the group. Her mother made an assenting gesture; and moreover it was impossible to doubt Francis George's unsmiling British countenance.

"No spoofing. Honor bright!" said he soberly. "I just thought I'd tell you because I remember

the things that graveled *me* the worst. Now what would you think, for example, if you saw some fellow walking along the street all gotten up in a uniform with braid and buttons and a sword and a cocked hat and feathers like an admiral, or maybe a red fez? I've seen 'em with fezzes. Extraordinary! Well, he isn't the Persian Ambassador or the King of Cambodia, or that sort of thing, y'know. His name's probably Virgil K. Stokes—one of those American names—and he's an awfully high cockalorum in one of those fraternal orders. For example, the—the——" Mr. Macready hesitated and looked to the Amercan men for help. "*You* know——"

"To be sure! He's the Past Exalted Grand Potentate of the Association of Assyrian Nobles," Dick responded, smiling yet subtly annoyed, he scarcely knew why. "It's quite true, Natalie, and the town will be full of them. You'll get used to it."

"Assyrian Nobles! Quite so!" exclaimed Mr. Macready gratefully. "They have conventions, y'know. Processions and dinners with speeches like Lord Mayor's Day. The town's all strung with banners with '*Welcome, Assyrians!*' on 'em. I remember once they had signs on all the taxis

inviting them to take a ride: '*Hop in, Sir Noble!*' And some chap took one of the '*Hop in*' placards and posted it up alongside the lake in Paradise Park. Look dashed queer, and people laughed."

The others endorsed the judgment of the American public by laughing in their turn; but Natalie spoke with a knowing little air. "That's all very well, but you can't make me believe *everything*, you know."

It was a comment which unaccountably caused an embarrassed silence for half a second. Dick Meryon's eyes encountered Mrs. Lee's again, and this time he read there, to his surprise, a mixture of chagrin, unwilling amusement, aroused and defensive national pride, identical with his own. They were besides, as he now noticed, rather unusual eyes, quick and expressive, and darkly clear like agate; but he had only a provokingly transient glimpse of them and incidentally, as it seemed to him, of Mrs. Lee's inmost soul, for she looked away again instantly. Young Jack Harkness was assuring Miss Stevens somewhat vehemently that there was no hoax about the late revelations. He repeated Dick's own words. "You'll get used to it."

II

THE ship's life went on with the not unpleasant monotony of ship life, the passengers gradually assorting themselves by those processes known to some circles as "getting acquainted," and to others as "finding their level." There was some mild gambling on the day's run, at auction in the smoking-room and lounges, even upon the results of shuffle-board and ring-toss around the decks. Various favored persons were to be heard enlarging loftily about having been taken to view the officers' quarters, the steerage, the engine-rooms, the wireless operators' cubby-hole. Energetic souls with some turn for administration went about drumming up talent for the concert. Mrs. Stevens, from her chair, continued to survey the passing scene and to receive confidences with her manner of detached sympathy, the Americanization of Natalie meanwhile going forward briskly with results that alternately relieved and dismayed her mother. Mr. Sloane-Macready might be seen taking his constitutional regularly, but

not so often in the company of Mr. Lee; the latter gentleman seemed to spend most of his time yawning over a novel from the ship's library, or playing solitaire at one of the writing-tables, continually dropping cards and retrieving them, or getting up to offer the place to somebody whom he conceived to be desirous of it, or when any of the women spoke to him. He had a manner of heavy yet somehow spontaneous deference toward them all, including his wife, who would occasionally pass by, according him the bright, impersonal glance she accorded everybody. The rank and file of the passengers voted her snobbish at the same time that they pronounced him a perfect gentleman, even if, as they would sometimes add in qualification, he was a little quiet and didn't have much to say.

Mr. Richard Meryon, if he concurred in the latter opinion, never went on record as to the other. He advanced, imperceptibly to himself and certainly without especial effort or intention, from an exchange of casual greetings with Mrs. Lee to a habit of equally casual chatting when they fell in with each other on their separate rambles. Once he gave her his arm when the deck was slippery and slanting uncomfortably;

and once he fetched her rug from the steward's office. These ordinary intimacies of a transatlantic passage did not lead them into further intimacies; not even his well-established acquaintance with her husband and the tolerably certain prospect of life in the same city and the same social circle could overcome what appeared to be a reserve characteristic of her. Dick had his own reserves, partly native, partly tutored; he knew his sophisticated world, and: "We're all mortally afraid of giving ourselves away," was his familiar judgment delivered with a good-humored cynicism. For all his experience, however, he said to himself that he could not quite make out Mrs. Ledyard Lee; she interested by defeating him. And having just reached these conclusions, he was the more surprised when one day, instead of dismissing him, as it were, with the indifferent civility to which he had grown used, she said: "I think it's so odd we never met before, Mr. Meryon. I've visited down there for weeks at a time, with Juliet Ordway and some of the other girls that I went to Dobbs' Ferry to school with. I'm sure you know most of them."

There was a kind of engaging abruptness about

her manner that in some way banished all doubt of its sincerity. Dick's private comment was that the thaw had set in; Mrs. Lee had finally decided that she would recognize him on land, at home! "Why, I don't go out a great deal. None of us ancient relics go out with the *débutante* set, you know how that is," he said and smiled. "We're too feeble and stricken in years to stand the pace, even if they wanted us around."

"They always want all the men they can get hold of around, *you* know how *that* is," Mrs. Lee retorted coolly, but smiling, too. She reverted to the first theme with some insistence. "I thought I knew everybody there."

"Everybody" is a locution by which, as he knew, she meant a limited number of citizens intangibly yet none the less securely entrenched within certain social boundaries of whose existence Dick Meryon and the other everybodies were perfectly aware, although not one would have acknowledged it. All this considered, it *was* odd they had never met, he was thinking when she spoke again. "I remember meeting a Mrs. Meryon, though. Led says it must have been——"

"My wife, yes. We're the only Meryons there now, even in the telephone book," said Dick. He

ceased to speculate, all interest suddenly disappearing from his face.

"I met her only once," said Mrs. Lee. "It was at a symphony concert. Somebody introduced us. But there was a huge crowd, and it's rather confusing for a stranger, you know—one gets the names all mixed up——"

"Yes, of course."

"I didn't connect her with you at once. In fact, I'm afraid I don't remember her face," said Mrs. Lee apologetically. "But then I daresay she doesn't remember mine, either."

Mr. Meryon uttered some commonplaces relating obscurely to the better acquaintance of the two ladies; he had the air of being willing to drop the subject, but his companion apparently was not.

"This winter, with a young girl in the family, you and Mrs. Meryon will have to reform your ways and begin 'going the pace' again whether or no," she said, not without a spark of mischief in the look she cast at him. "You expect to do something for Miss Stevens, don't you? A dinner-dance or a theatre-party or *something*? Cheer up! It won't be so bad once you get into it."

He surprised her by taking the suggestion seri-

ously. "Why, yes, I—I really think we ought to. I'd be very glad to. Of course, I don't know what arrangements Mrs. Meryon has been making for the winter," he said somewhat anxiously. "She's always tremendously busy about this time, and—er—she plans everything a good deal ahead, you know, her clubs and all that. Still, I should think it would be possible to get in something for Natalie——" His eyes met hers for a fugitive moment in masculine helplessness and appeal; then he withdrew them hurriedly. We are all mortally afraid of giving ourselves away!

Mrs. Lee, for her part, might almost have been accused of giving herself away by the astonishment, the inquiry, the satirical conjecture she allowed her features to express successively. At the end these divers emotions were summed up, to judge by externals, in one of frank compassion. The pause was in danger of becoming embarrassing when she mustered some light word about a girl always having a good time her first season. "And it will all be so new to your cousin—as new as she will be to everybody else. I predict a great success. Because she won't have much trouble learning American ways, and

everybody will think it pretty to see her learning, even if it is a little funny at times."

"Yes?" Dick acquiesced, but doubtfully. The moment of awkwardness, however, seemed unaccountably to have bridged over certain conventional inhibitions, contrary to what might have been expected; it was with a confidential amusement that he went on: "I was a good deal disconcerted the other night when Macready was talking to her. Everything he said was perfectly true and not in the least exaggerated, but—well, you know the late Mr. Burns on the subject of seeing ourselves as others see us."

Mrs. Lee exclaimed eagerly. "I *wondered* if you weren't—I mean if it didn't affect you the same way it did me. I hope I didn't show—at least I hope nobody but you noticed——"

"Yes? I couldn't help laughing, and yet I—well, I'm not going to find fault with my own country, or be ashamed or make fun of it, still, sometimes——"

"I know! That's just the way I felt. And there isn't any way of explaining to outsiders. One feels disloyal, even contemptible, to be amused or to wish some things were different."

They looked at each other in sudden warm

understanding and companionship; this talk, that to anyone overhearing it would have sounded fragmentary, to say the least, if not wholly lacking in sense and sequence, was to them an illumination that still left shadows, corners, byways of alluring mystery. Their two ordinarily composed and worldly faces wore, for one second, the happy surprise of a boy and girl delighting in discovery. "I'm glad it was only *you*," they began in concert, and after a moment of parallel confusion, ended with laughter.

The prospective débutante, all this while, was not bothering her youthful head with problems of entertainment and social success nearly so much as her seniors. All Natalie's effort nowadays was concentrated upon acquiring the latest American speech, the latest American dance-step, the latest American point of view. Under the careful and constant tuition of Mr. Harkness she bade fair to become quite proficient in the first two branches; the last, as the young people themselves indistinctly realized, was a matter of atmosphere and environment scarcely to be communicated by any known system of instruction. Neither Jack nor Marian, who likewise sometimes took a hand with the neophyte, could get any

further in precept or example than: "They don't do that at home, you know." For the rest, the girl was quick enough, and without doubt a definite inheritance of traditions and standards passed on or kept alive almost unconsciously by her mother helped her. At any rate, Mrs. Stevens, looking on, put aside some of her early misgivings.

"Of course there must have been changes since the war, or even before it, in all these ten years, and I daresay some of them will be revolutionary according to my antiquated notions," she said to Mrs. Macready. "But the old rules must still hold about everything that matters."

"Oh, I don't know that there has been anything one could exactly call revolutionary," said the other lady. She was somewhat younger than Mrs. Stevens, handsome, distinguished, always impeccably dressed and in the opinion of their fellow-voyagers only slightly less *distant* and *exclusive* (their own phrases) than Mrs. Ledyard Lee and *all that crowd*—also their phrase. She went on expounding in her agreeable, well-bred voice. "Ever so many new people, of course. But you know there always are new people coming up. The only difference is that it seems rather easier

for them to get in nowadays than it used to be. I really don't know whether that is because of the war, or whether it was getting easier anyhow. All the young people know all the other young people, for one thing; there don't seem to be any lines drawn any more. Old ladies like Mrs. Grace and Mrs. Hector MacQuair are perfectly horrified to hear about somebody whose families nobody knew in *their* day going about everywhere and being received in everybody's home; but nobody else cares. Some people say it's the automobiles and athletics and—er—and all those things that have done it," she concluded vaguely.

"And then I understand it's quite the vogue for everybody to *do* something—all the girls, I mean—even when they don't have to?"

"Oh, yes. But you know they always did, if they had had a year or two out, and hadn't got married. Only it used to be charities or something like that, and now they take up nearly everything, go into business-offices or teaching, like working-girls. One of Marian's friends has a country-place and raises chickens. I really don't think she does much of it herself; I think she has some chicken expert that attends to all the actual work. But that's just a sample."

"Well, Natalie has her violin," said Natalie's mother, not without a mildly satirical amusement. "No great virtuoso, I'm afraid, still she *can* play."

"Yes, and there's a great deal of *that*, too. Semi-professional music and acting and dancing—much more than we were ever allowed to do in *my* time," said Mrs. Macready indifferently. "Mama was scandalized at first when we let Marian; she thought it was so *public*. She still thinks the pictures in all the papers—you know? Photographs of your house and the children and the dogs and the weddings and everything?—well, Mama still thinks all that is horribly vulgar, but she doesn't say anything any more. It's all a matter of style anyhow, don't you think? And everything changes so quickly nowadays that in six months or less we may all be doing the exact opposite! It's not worth while to worry."

"Oh, I'm quite resigned. Only Natalie having been brought up on the continent, where practically all the old fashions are still in force, I don't know how she is going to take. How is it in England?"

"About the same as with us. Some things are done, and some things aren't done, you know."

"Yes, that's the way it has always been every-

where, after all," said Mrs. Stevens comfortably. The bugle sounded, and they went down to luncheon. After a while Mr. Lee came in, and after another, longer while—the rest had reached the salad, in fact—his wife and Mr. Meryon, diverging to their separate tables. Dick was in notably high spirits.

After sundry conversations such as the above, Mrs. Stevens was beginning to feel not only resigned, as she said, but tolerably well prepared; the long expatriation had not operated as seriously as she had feared, and this venturesome return was not going to end in defeat. There were still some old friends left; her narrow means, about which the poor lady had had some frightened moments, would still suffice even under the strain of increased living expenses to launch Natalie and keep them going until—why not put it plainly?—until the child married or took to her violin, the mother thought, smiling with a gentle malice directed quite as much at herself as at certain conventions of her native land. It occurred to her that, however much we may decry it, we must allow to old-world society a stark candor and common-sense not unworthy of imitation within limits. She recalled the French

mothers who, in practical vein and without a vestige of false sentimentality, had discoursed to her about the difficulties attendant upon the disposal of daughters. Marquise or milliner—Mrs. Stevens had known both—it was all one. The main duty of a conscientious parent, as they saw it, was to get *Hélène* or *Marcelle* settled; a good marriage with a reasonable amount of money on both sides for the young household to make a beginning—how much care, thought, tact would be expended in that object, based upon how real a solicitude! If the truth were told that same good marriage and advantageous settlement occupy some corner of the mind of every mother on earth, no matter what her nationality; and about the complacent assumptions to the contrary popular with her countrymen and countrywomen, Mrs. Stevens thought she detected some cheapness, some indifference to responsibilities. Even she, *Judith Stevens*, she said to herself acidly, even she would not admit openly that what she would like to see more than anything else in this world was *Natalie* a success, *Natalie* with any number of suitors, *Natalie* married, preferably to a man with money! The mating of hearts is a lottery at best, what harm in making sure of the

purses, as far as humanly possible? She believed herself to be above scheming, she recoiled from the mere suggestion, and yet was she not fairly content that chance was now throwing Natalie and the Harkness boy together? Jack was a clean, manly, young fellow, as anyone could see—and he was a son of David Harkness, the millionaire oil man. That had nothing to do with her predilection in his favor, oh, nothing at all! Mrs. Stevens was capable of surveying herself at once with amusement and a sort of humble self-justification. When all was said and done, such a marriage was fully as likely to turn out fortunately as another where neither of the young people had a cent. Well, then——

She was in the middle of these reflections when Natalie treated her to one of those disturbing surprises we occasionally receive from the rising generation which reveal the fact that they too can reflect, and furthermore that they can observe. It was one night as they were going to bed that the girl abruptly inquired: "Mother, what is Cousin Cecilia like?"

"Cousin Cecilia?" Mrs. Stevens echoed, a little startled. "You mean your Cousin Dick's—— You mean *that* Cousin Cecilia?" Her surprise was

complicated with a kind of vexation; she was forever forgetting Dick's wife, forever forgetting that he was married at all! It was inexplicable and unpardonable. "Why, I—I don't know, Natalie," she said, recovering. "They were married after we went back to Europe this last time—I mean after your father died when I took you over. Of course she's a great deal younger than I am, so it happens that we have never met——"

"Yes, but you know who she was?"

"Oh, certainly. She was a Miss Applegate. You don't remember it, I suppose, it must be eight or nine years ago, but we had cards at the time of the wedding. I think we were in Brussels."

"Applegate? Well, you know all her people anyhow? You know everybody at home."

What was there about this innocent curiosity that disconcerted the older woman? Perhaps, to her well-schooled ear, it was not so innocent as it sounded; it was too inexorable. Perhaps that familiar "everybody," innocuous enough on Mrs. Macready's lips, jarred on the mother a little, coming from Natalie. Or perhaps again it was merely the obligation to answer in the negative that for some reason embarrassed her. "Why,

no, I don't know the Applegates personally, Natalie. Of course I've always known *about* them," she said, stretching the truth with a disproportionate sense of guilt. "But I never happened to meet any of them. Your father and I were always traveling about, you know. We never stayed at home long enough to—to settle down and—er—and see anything of people," she explained haltingly.

There was a silence. Mrs. Stevens, seated at the diminutive dressing-table, brushing out her hair which was abundant still, though its original chestnut had given place to a faded grey-brown, stole a look through the veil of hanging locks at the young face behind and above her. It was thoughtful but inscrutable. "I believe Cecilia's very pretty. Somebody told me she was *very* pretty," she supplemented in haste; even to her own ears the addition sounded somehow feeble and pointless. Moreover, it made no visible impression on Natalie.

"Oh, is she? Well, I thought you would know her. Nobody else does," said the girl with a light shrug. Then she reconsidered. "Of course I do not always understand. That is my great trouble."

"What is it you think you may not understand this time?" her mother asked in her habitually casual manner, but privately uneasy with a strange feeling of being called on to defend Cecilia Meryon—or Dick, she was not certain which!

Natalie doubled up cozily in her berth; she spoke in the tongue most familiar to her with a shy confidence, manifestly afraid of her mother's amusement, yet sure of her sympathy. "You see I was beginning to wonder if there was something with Cousin Cecilia—if she had something perhaps——"

Mrs. Stevens arrested her with a gesture. "*Do* speak English, Natalie!" she said almost peevishly. "You wondered if there was something the matter with her. That is the way to say it. But you must get that idea out of your head. I can't imagine how it ever got in!"

"Why, I don't know, unless it was because nobody has ever mentioned her," Natalie said with a defeating simplicity. "Nobody but Mrs. Lee, that is, and she——"

"Yes?" said her mother apprehensively.

"She only said that she had heard Mrs. Meryon was one of those useful, important, prominent

women, and tremendously intellectual. But Mrs. Lee has a way of saying things sometimes——” the girl said at once meaningly and trustfully. “*You* know, mother!” Their eyes met, and Natalie went on as by an afterthought: “Cousin Dick wasn’t there when she said it.”

“I supposed he wasn’t,” said the older woman drily. “I don’t think you need to pay attention to everything Mrs. Lee says, however.”

“They all laughed, so I pretended to laugh too, but I really did not understand,” Natalie confessed with naïveté. “That did not seem at all funny to me or to laugh at. *Une femme très instruite——*”

“Natalie, *please!* If you drop into French that way, it will sound affected to a great many people, and in the worst possible taste. You *must* be careful!” Mrs. Stevens admonished her with undue severity. It arose from an inward irritation at finding herself for the first time in her life in a false or at least a confusingly unstable position. All at once she discovered that there were things it was impossible to explain to Natalie, things she had taken for granted the child would know by instinct, brought up as she had been by the unwritten, unacknowledged, but

none the less rigid code in which Judith herself had been schooled. Now unquestioningly, almost automatically obeying that same code, she did not consider for one instant making any attempt to enlighten the young girl; Natalie must arrive at enlightenment by herself, unprejudiced and undirected. "After you have been at home a while, everything will be much easier for you," was as far as the mother would go in counsel.

For once, however, Natalie found it inadequate. "Maybe. But I can see it's going to be more different than I thought," she said pensively. "It's so—so *contradictory*, somehow. All the people we've met so far knowing Cousin Dick so well, and not one of them knowing Cousin Cecilia at all! One would think he would notice it himself. But then he almost never speaks about her, either."

Mrs. Stevens sat dumb for a second, then she rallied. "Naturally he doesn't. Men don't go dragging their wives and families into every haphazard conversation—men like your Cousin Dick, at any rate. I see there's a good deal for you to learn yet." She was beginning fluently, though with no very clear vision as to how she would

finish, when the *General Jackson* intervened providentially with an unexpected roll to leeward. Their wardrobe-trunk staggered forward, staggered back; Natalie, who had just risen, took an involuntary journey to the other berth; Mrs. Stevens abandoned every other effort, clutching at the edge of the table; the toilette apparatus skidded wildly; and in the outcry and laughter and clatter the little scene ended. Natalie did not open the subject again, and later her mother, who was not without some endowment of humor, smiled to herself at the shifts she had been put to, she a seasoned veteran of the social fields! Her smile sharpened a trifle at the recollection of Mrs. Lee's descriptive phrases, yet she shook her head with an expression of whimsical regret. "Poor Dick!" she was thinking.

Poor Dick was having the time of his life, in the words of another authority, to wit: Mr. Sloane-Macready, the last man on earth, however, from whom one would expect much perspicacity. Francis George did not look as if he were in the slightest degree interested by or observant of his fellow-men; and whatever he saw behind his monocle his manner gave the impression that he

regarded it as none of his business. Nevertheless he remarked to his wife from the threshold between their rooms in the undemocratic deck-suite: "I say, y'know, Marian——"

"Yes?" said Mrs. Macready, absently, with her eyes on the mirror. Her maid had just left, after achieving a stunning effect with the lady's toilette; Mrs. Macready justified the effort; she was a very handsome woman.

"Meryon's having the time of his life, what!"

"Yes?" said his wife again. "And what about our other friend?" she suggested.

They exchanged a glance of understanding, and Francis George, after some deliberation, uttered cryptic words. "Pretty thick, *I* call it, for only six months married."

"I suppose she was getting bored. Six months of *him!*"

Her husband deliberated again. "Dashed pity!" he said finally. "A man like that——" He wagged his head in disapproval, but was careful to add, "No affair of ours, of course." And after another instant of thought: "All the same, it isn't cricket!"

"Oh, they won't keep it up, Frank, once we're

landed. Everything's different the minute one gets off the ship. You know. People separate, and that's the end of lots of affairs."

"Yes, I know. But we'll all see one another again at home. You can't ever tell," said the gentleman oracularly. "No affair of ours, though," he reiterated, and lit a cigarette.

It was the evening of the concert, and Mrs. Lee may have bestowed some extra care on her appearance, though, as possibly she realized, she was one of the fortunate few who do not need to be pretty. Her odd, noticeable face, irregularly attractive, returned from the mirror a survey of bright satisfaction. She wore her thick, straight, black hair brushed back from her forehead in the last and most trying Parisian mode, the coils flattened to the shape of her head with a sedulous dexterity; she had a narrow black gown, a jade armlet clasped high up nearly at her shoulder, a scarf fantastically confected of dead blue crêpe with borders of black fur and a lining of figured tomato-red stuff woven through with tarnished gold and silver threads. She was as decorative as a Chinese lacquer panel; indeed, Mr. Meryon told her she reminded him of one.

"All you need is some of their embossed pink

and silver apple-blossoms in your hair and a gilt lattice-work pagoda in the background," he declared. "Is the effect intentional?"

"Oh, no. I just studied up what seemed to suit me best, the way I always do," she answered honestly.

"I daresay most people think you ought to appear in some kind of *Carmen* get-up, don't they? Do you ever?"

"No, it would be too obvious!" Mrs. Lee said, with a disdainful gesture. "It's true, though, I've often had that suggested to me. How did you guess?"

"Why, I know by intuition how the minds of my fellow-bromides work. You have dark hair and eyes, and a Spanish-sounding name." Dick paused, not foreseeing the effect that would be produced; for when he pronounced her name a second later, it was as if he had addressed her direct. "Anita."

She replied mechanically and as unthinkingly as himself. "Yes? What is it? *Oh!*"

They stood for a half minute of devastating embarrassment, avoiding each other's eyes, frantically trying to recover their balance which both were aware ought never to have been lost over

such a trifle. Mrs. Lee was the first to get herself in hand, so superior are the feminine powers in emergency. She manufactured a laugh, putting aside the apologies he presently began to stammer.

"Wasn't that absurd? It's just as you say; my name is unusual and rather foreign, so whenever I hear it I'm liable to answer just as if I were the only Anita in the world."

Dick got out something of which the burden was unwarrantable impertinence, but he hadn't meant—he hoped she understood! And all the while it was as if they were engaged in some kind of conversational steeplechase, hurdling things that could not be said, stumbling over suddenly discovered hazards, companioned by a tumultuous field of wildly coursing and ungovernable thoughts. Relief—yet somehow a relief not wholly desired—came in the guise of Marian Macready junior, running up to warn them that everybody was going into the men's lounge, the big one, and they must not miss Natalie's part of the entertainment.

"The rest is perfectly punk," she informed them candidly. "They've put her in the middle so the audience won't get down-hearted and fade away

before it's finished. Mr. Lee's saving all our places together. Better come now if you think you can stand it."

They went almost too readily, almost too gay and voluble in their talk, almost unconscious that they were contriving to keep the girl between them as they sauntered, as if to ensure and emphasize the casual quality of their association, not only in the eyes of the world, but in their own. A steamer acquaintance, an exchange of the ordinary courtesies of travel, it was no more than that, of course. People thus accidentally thrown together must make the best of the enforced companionship, must even accept it with outward relish, if they would be numbered with civilized human beings. Likewise other civilized human beings of whom the Macready pair and Mrs. Charles Stevens offered notable examples must comport themselves as if, having eyes, they saw nothing; having ears, heard nothing—an attitude which they all achieved to perfection. The code, always the code!

In the men's lounge, there was that good-natured fellow, Ledyard Lee, holding the chairs against all and sundry, like What's-his-name in the poem, Francis George observed, without a

smile, drawing down the left side of his face to fix his monocle. "‘Lord of the Isles, my trust in thee is firm as Thingumbob!’"

"Eh? Is there somebody else?" said the other, perturbed, looking around inquiringly, yet still watchful of his chairs. "Pardon me, I didn't get the name——" He remarked to his wife in an undertone that he had supposed he had seen everybody on the ship, and wasn't it funny how new ones kept turning up right along? But it was always like that toward the end of a crossing. This person Macready was talking about, who was he or she, did Anita know?

"I don't think there is anybody, Ledyard, Mr. Macready was just in fun," she answered, smiling at him confidentially, turning her shoulder toward Mr. Meryon. In fact, she devoted herself to her husband for the rest of the evening.

Jack and some other youth were down on the program for a double-shuffle which they performed with creditable spirit and agility in unerring time to the lively air pounded out on the piano by a stout, bald, spectacled man who in private life occupied the chair of higher mathematics at Seminole University, it was rumored. Another gentleman assisted in hanging Danny

Deever; a frightened little girl recited nursery verses in a high, piping voice with a catch in her breath at the beginning of every sentence; then Natalie got up. She had to play alone, as no one could be found hardy enough to undertake the accompaniments, but the ordeal seemed to have no terrors for her. She stood before them, a slip of a girl with arms and neck not yet quite filled out, in her plain white dress, smiling seriously, earnest-eyed, completely self-forgetful. She drew the bow, and with the first firm and rich note, the fat professor of mathematics sat forward, tense, his spectacles fairly aglow. At the end he sat back with a long sigh of content. There was some stir and whispering around the audience, and for a moment the applause risked being so much more vehement and sustained than that which other performers were receiving as to be indecorous. People near Mrs. Stevens inquired in complimentary accents if she were not very proud of her daughter, words which she accepted with other gratifying comments in a manner not complacent, not deprecatory, only smiling her pleasant, tired smile. Dick Meryon, on the contrary, permitted himself a hearty enthusiasm.

“The child can play, Cousin Judith, she can

play!" he asserted two or three times vigorously. "Of course, *you* won't crow," he added, with a glance into her carefully controlled face; "but *I* can and I propose to! Bravo, Natalie!"

The girl came and sat down by them with her violin on her knee, a little excited, flushed and eager. "I'm glad they all liked it," she said. "But I can do better than that, Cousin Dick, I can do better!"

III

TWENTY-ODD years before the clear, snapping autumn day when the *General Jackson* docked in New York harbor, there were some wedding cards issued in the inland city of Mrs. Stevens' birth which mightily interested the members of her more or less restricted social circle, not to mention the young lady herself. Her name was Judith Meryon in those days; she finished at Dobbs' Ferry, where mid-western society used to send so many of its daughters, in '97, and had two or three months of European travel, and came out the following winter; and there were two seasons of teas and cotillions and Riding Club circuses and tennis tournaments and charity balls, two summers at Bar Harbor and White Sulphur culminating satisfactorily in the wedding cards. She and Natalie came across one of them preserved among other worthless treasures of the same era, favors, programmes and what-not in an old desk that was brought to light when their household effects were routed out of storage. Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Meryon requested the honor of

your presence at the marriage of their daughter, Judith, to Mr. Charles Fordyce Stevens on a date in June at the Church of All Saints. The small and delicate script was engraved on note paper of proportionately dainty size in the extreme of *fin-de-siècle* fashionable taste; to the widow who had scarcely seen it since she was a bride, the thing was a much more forcible reminder of the lapse of time even than the contemporary photograph of herself as contrasted with what she faced in her mirror nowadays. Natalie examined it with a touched curiosity. The new Mrs. Stevens of that long-past day was a pretty girl; she smiled self-consciously upon the world among flowing breadths of silk crêpe elaborated with a serpentine design of incredibly minute tucks in parallel groups, the surfaces between enriched with needlework garlands and true-lovers' knots. Bell sleeves drooped amply about her forearms; the waist sloped down smooth and snug over what was known as a straight-front corset; her hair towered up from her face in a marcelled pompadour with the groom's little diamond star gleaming above it from the midst of orange blossoms and a cloudy handful of tulle. There she stood, and Natalie's survey approved of her.

"It's funny, of course," was her comment. "But all the same, it's very sweet. I didn't know you had shower bouquets then."

"Oh, yes. They were new, but the fashion was so pretty it took at once, and it's never entirely gone out since. Mine was white sweet peas and lilies of the valley, and all the girls carried the same, only pink peas instead of white ones." Mrs. Stevens examined the card in her turn, through her eyeglasses. "I don't look as if I had much sense, do I? That simper! But it was considered a good likeness for a bride. There is always something a little strained and artificial about such pictures, you know."

"No, it's not in the least stupid looking, and you're just as pretty as ever, only different," Natalie cried out warmly. Sitting on the floor among the heaped papers and odds and ends, she cuddled against her mother's knee with little caressing movements. "Anyhow, you've always looked like *somebody*, the same way Mrs. Lee does!"

The older lady rebuked a passing, tickled vanity with her sage, humorous, ironical smile; she was not unaware that that early characterless bloom had been replaced by some quality of dis-

tion attractive, too, in its degree. At any rate, no one could say of her photograph nowadays that it did not look as if she had much sense. "I hope you never point that out to anybody else, though, Natalie. My semblance of being *somebody*, as you think."

"Oh, *mother!* As if I *would!*"

"Well, it's very easy to fall into some kinds of mistakes," said Mrs. Stevens meditatively. "Judging by a good many of the people we met on the boat, that is. And there seemed to be more and more of that same kind wherever one went on the continent I've noticed of late, since the war, especially. I remember feeling quite touched up and resentful when Madame de Saint Pol, or some other old lady from the Faubourg, I'm not sure who, said to me that all the Americans were such terribly happy, pleased, self-satisfied people! But she was right. They run around all over France and everywhere else, with a kind of little-children-love-one-another atmosphere about them. They're not exactly unsophisticated, either. I don't know what it is——" She mused with a puzzled expression, tapping her closed lorgnette against her lips, a habitual little mannerism. "It wasn't so in the old days—or perhaps

I was too benighted myself to know it! We seemed to be more grown-up, I think; we used to poke fun at what we called mutual-admiration societies. But now they seem to take mutual admiration very seriously."

"Well, one doesn't have to know that kind," said Natalie coolly, continuing to sort out and inspect photographs. Her mother looked at her almost frightened. It was unthinkable that only a fortnight of certain influences, half at sea, half since they landed, could have brought the girl to the sub-acid maturity of that speech, she who had been so much the ingénue before. Yet that was what had happened; or was this precocious sophistry merely the result of training and suggestion and example working upon her all these years like a leaven? Mrs. Stevens reviewed her own conceptions of maternal duties in a kind of panic of self-justification; surely she had never knowingly instilled into Natalie any such principle as that she could pick and choose among her acquaintance, cavalierly discarding those whom she did not consider desirable? Surely while sincerely laboring to give her daughter the right standards by which to judge manners and ideals, the standards of "nice people," she had not blun-

dered into doctrine the very reverse, calculating and ignoble? The trouble was, she perceived unwillingly, a species of misleading truth about the statement; it was only common-sense, it was a measure of self-defense, to be careful about the people one knew; but it ought not to be put that way, it ought not to be talked about at all, the mother thought, and in spite of her she smiled at herself.

"Here's a picture of papa I've never seen before," said Natalie, holding it up to her, and Mrs. Stevens had recourse to her eyeglasses again.

"Oh, that's the one he always laughed at, and wouldn't have around where anybody could see it. It was taken for the newspapers after he got the Prix de Bruxelles. The photographer insisted on that ridiculous frock-coat and pose. Your father used to say it made him look like an undertaker who was running for the Vice-Presidency!"

She laughed not without a certain tenderness of recollection; but the essence of this eminently national piece of fun-making escaped Natalie, whose Americanization was not yet complete enough to savor it. Moreover, the mention of the Prix de Bruxelles influenced her to gravity; the girl herself had worked hard at a difficult art,

and the achievements of others in artistic fields commanded her respect. She knew her father's brief history. Charles Stevens was an architect; he had studied, worked and attained considerable success before his marriage; after it a number of years at intervals in European schools and under the giants of the profession, and in particular the winning of the Prix de Bruxelles seemed to assure his prospects. He came back to America for good, as they expected, opened an office, was well on the way to fortune and celebrity when an attack of pneumonia carried him off with tragic suddenness the winter of 1911. The City Hall and public gardens of Metropolis, Oklahoma, the peristyle fronting the lake at Fontevrault, Michigan, the beautiful residence in the purest French Renaissance order of Senator Squires at Camden Four Corners in the Berkshires, all had to be finished without him, but ". . . They remain enduring monuments to the memory of the brilliant talent by whose untimely extinction our country and this association have suffered a profound and irreparable loss . . ." to quote from the resolutions presented by the National Society of Architects at the time. A special copy, handsomely

engrossed on parchment, was forwarded to the widow who, rumor had it, was left in opulent circumstances. But the truth was Mrs. Stevens found her circumstances not quite opulent enough for her accustomed scale of living in the United States, though she thought she could manage in Europe. Natalie was about ten years old, and had already given signs of an artistic bent, which the mother fondly believed she inherited from the dead man, though in a different direction. The girl had only a foggy recollection of her father, notwithstanding all Judith's efforts to keep it alive and distinct; and likewise notwithstanding her efforts Natalie grew up something of an alien to her land, as has been seen.

On arrival, after much searching, they found an apartment in an old remodeled house on Church Street, the North Hill, a neighborhood which, though no longer fashionable, still retained many of the characteristics that, in Mrs. Stevens' youth had been summed up by real-estate agents in the word "select." With her acquired old-world thrift, and her memories of the comparative moderation of ante-war days, she was at first appalled by the altitudinous rents; but before long the pessimistic resignation of her friends

gained upon her, too. Hopeless to inveigh against conditions, or await any betterment, they assured her; there would never be any return to the earlier levels. Everything was at an exorbitant rate, fuel, food, service, clothes, amusements, and above all, so much above as to cast into shadow the other expenses, monstrous as they were, taxes. One and all, the most conservative, the least loquacious, they waxed eloquent in denunciation whenever the subject was broached, that is to say at every hour of the day, at every gathering. It appeared that Uncle Sam, the liberal, tolerant and efficient administrator of the best government on earth, the great-hearted dispenser of opportunity to the down-trodden masses elsewhere, he in short who held the lamp beside the golden door, Uncle Sam was a dolt, a despot, a piratical blackguard when it came to taxes! He made laws which were an outrage, and enforced them outrageously except when, as in the case of the Eighteenth Amendment, he did not enforce them at all, which was another outrage! Mrs. Stevens listened abstractedly, preoccupied with anxieties that centered about her meager bank-balance; if it had seemed inadequate ten years ago, what was it going to be now? Yet there

were moments when the recollection stirred within her of having heard all this or something singularly like it in the past, before her marriage, when she was a child, all her life, even in that Golden Age that everybody was looking back to with such regret. When was a democrat ever satisfied with his democracy? It is his privilege to exalt it publicly and grumble about it savagely in private. She was told, by some with laughter, by others with indignation, that she could vote nowadays; the women citizens had been voting for several years, and in spite of the benefits promised and expected from this change, still the government was found fault with, still the taxes rose. Some sour students of political economy maintained that the extension of the suffrage had had no effect except to increase the number of voters, and by consequence the number of polling-booths, talesmen and petty official personnel generally, at a depletion of the public purse in direct ratio. But whatever the theme every argument and exposition invariably wound up with the same expression of a cynical philosophy of inertia, *viz.*: What were you going to do about it?

Miss Natalie Stevens, for her part, had no intention of doing anything about it. She was by

far too pleased, interested, amused by every fresh experience, every side-light, or full, head-on glare, for that matter, cast upon the habits and institutions of her country. To the girl, brought up in boarding-schools and continental *pensions*, subjected to a stern discipline at her music, whose memories afforded nothing more dramatic than the purchase once in a dishearteningly long while of a new dress or hat, a few weeks at one of the less known pleasure resorts, a seat at the Opera, and latterly some modest triumphs of her own in concerts and recitals, to this girl the gayeties of an American social season undertaken for and carried on by people of her own age, resembled an excursion into fairyland. Merely to have a home, merely to keep house in their apartment, which she presently learned with an ingenuous delight to call a "duplex" or a "Saint Louis flat," she found the happiest of adventures. Indeed, small and plain as were their surroundings, it was perhaps in the character of the Stevens mother and daughter to invest their life with a kind of high simplicity, and their frugal expedients never became parsimonious. The tiny sitting-room had bare gray walls; there were chairs, a shelf of books, the old cabinet of vermillion

lacquer that held Natalie's music, a writing-table, a black glass bowl of Chinese lilies, their thin, erect, bright green standards of leaves topped with pure-scented bloom. In the next room, there was just space for two nun-like beds, and a majestic chest of drawers with Corinthian columns up the front and carved paw feet; it had been made in the more spacious days of a feminine great-ancestor, the same one whose silhouette in a high headdress and a neck-ribbon formed one of the sparse decorations of their walls. Her imperious head and sharp *retroussé* profile suggested Natalie's a little, Mrs. Stevens thought. They had a table and two chairs in the kitchen, a half-curtain of starched muslin, white dotted with red at the window, a wooden dresser painted pumpkin-color with all their blue willow-pattern china ranged behind the glass panels of its upper part, an old shelf-clock with a bunch of roses and corn-flowers painted on the door below the face, and finally a gas-stove which both of them approached very gingerly in the beginning; later they laughed at those fears. It was here that they ate their European breakfast of coffee and rolls, experimented with omelettes, chocolate and salads for other meals, and cut thin

sandwiches in the afternoons for tea with visitors.

These ere long began to come in some numbers, and there was always quite a grist of cards in the morning's mail; but, as the holidays neared, and the activities in Natalie's circle increased, Mrs. Stevens noted with surprise that more and more of the invitations were delivered over the telephone, or in an equally careless and informal style when the youngsters met. It had not been so in her day, but her contemporaries informed her with sympathetic smiles that the present generation had changed all that. Nobody had time for any ceremony; the boys and girls were forever rushing at top speed from a luncheon, a tea, a matinée, a dinner, a dance to another luncheon, tea, matinée, dinner, dance, enabled to pack the twenty-four hours with twice the entertainment possible formerly, by their own automobiles or somebody else's—*everybody* had an automobile—into which they would crowd any number from two to a dozen. Half the time a mother scarcely knew where her débutante was, but there was no occasion for worry; she was where all the others were. They never did anything singly, but went in droves, and there were always some of the

younger married set along. To be sure, the younger married set could not be accounted very reliable balance-wheels, but they were married, and that had to appease whatever conventions remained in force. You did not want to spoil your girl's first winter out with old-fashioned, strait-laced regulations. Some people were always professing themselves shocked, and all sorts of stories were always going the rounds; but it was much the same in the old days. The North Hill, and other sections as well known socially, always had been perfect hotbeds of gossip, no matter how careful you were. Ah, is this Natalie?

For, at this juncture, as like as not, Natalie would fly in, to make a toilette preparatory to flying out again, with her bright, spirited face glowing between the high fur collar of her coat and the extinguisher-like hat which was the fashion of the hour jammed down over her eyes; and the caller would look her over graciously, deciding mentally that she had a good deal of style in a foreign way, and would probably keep on taking well as long as her novelty lasted.

"My dear, I'm Mrs. George Thatcher—but you needn't try to remember me, you can't possibly,

meeting so many of us. Besides, I'm a mere nonentity now, I'm nothing but Billy Thatcher's mother. Oh, yes, you know *him*, of course! And he knows *you* quite enthusiastically. But, Judith, if you think he or any of the rest know *you*, you're under a pitiable illusion. You're just Natalie Stevens' mother, in the same boat with myself and all the other mothers. *We* don't count any more. Eh? Why, Billy is tearing around like mad about this Glee Club thing. He's on the entertainment committee for the college men, you know. And I do hope, Natalie, you'll come to our dinner for them. We'll take her with us to the concert, of course, Judith, and to the Macreadys or whoever it is that's giving the ball afterward, there're so many holiday-week I get them all mixed up. Eh? Oh, Billy had already spoken to you about coming, Natalie? Well, that's very nice, then we'll expect you. You're musical, aren't you? Somebody said—— Oh, then you'll be *sure* to have a good time, all the Glee Club men are tremendously musical, of course. Mercy, is that clock right? I'll have to go this minute!"

With which and other amiable words, Mrs. Thatcher would gather up her bag, her huge, enveloping furs, her whole costly equipage, and

depart in an automobile *de luxe*, similar to the automobiles in which the other elegant matrons arrived. There was scarcely a day when these imposing vehicles were not coming and going busily before the Church Street doors. Judith Stevens was surprised and touched by the cordiality of her reception; people had not forgotten her, after all. It was true she had labored valiantly in her exile to be kept in remembrance. Perhaps she had endured some unpleasantness, and many, many times she had allowed herself to be made a convenience of with her handy acquaintance with foreign ways and tongues. She did it for Natalie's sake, and now felt gladly that it had been worth while.

For Natalie was attaining that most desirable of earthly ends, a good time. It was the more noticeable because she had not begun very brilliantly, knowing hardly any one, clinging to her mother's side, timid and lonely and over-conscious of the differences that seemed to isolate her. But whether it was owing to the Macreadys or to Jack Harkness or to Mr. and Mrs. Ledyard Lee who humanely made a marked effort to push the girl, even going so far as to entertain for her with a dinner and box-party, where Natalie met some

thirty of her fellow-débutantes and the attendant young men—whether owing to them or to her attraction as a novelty as Mrs. Thatcher benevolently suspected, or to some more worthy and inalienable attribute, Miss Stevens was rapidly making her own place and friends. The girls liked her, the men liked her, but Mrs. Lee remarked that she would luckily never be popular enough to be unpopular; and what the lady meant by that obscure epigram, let some other sprightly worldling like herself explain!

If she had taken time to think about anything save what immediately and most naturally concerned herself, among these enchanting experiences, Natalie might have noticed that all this while they were seeing nothing of their relatives, the Richard Meryons. They were a couple who never officiated as members of that “younger married set” who were depended on for chaperonage. Mrs. Stevens, whatever she guessed, kept it to herself, making little or no comment even when Natalie after that famous theatre-party of the Lees reported that she had seen Cousin Dick.

“He was in the audience, and Mrs. Lee saw him and nodded to him, so then he came around

to our box—I was sitting with her, but the men all visited back and forth among the boxes, of course, between acts—and oh, mother, he *is* perfectly lovely, and the girls were all wild about him, or they said they were, anyhow. And Mrs. Lee wanted him to stay, but he couldn't because he had Cousin Cecilia and somebody else, I think he said her niece, with him, so he had to go back to them. But after the next act, Mr. Lee got up and went and talked to them, and then Cousin Dick came over again and stayed with us the rest of the time. They just changed off, you see."

"Ah?" said her mother.

"I think Mrs. Lee told Mr. Lee to," said Natalie confidentially. "I suppose she thought it would look better. Anyhow, I saw her say something to him, and he got up and went right away."

"Ah?"

"Cousin Cecilia is ever so pretty, mother. Cousin Dick said he told her which one I was, and afterward she looked at me and smiled and bowed, so I smiled and bobbed back."

Mrs. Stevens uttered a third "Ah," and inquired what the niece was like, but here Natalie was at fault. She had had only a glimpse of the other girl, but thought she remembered seeing her

before somewhere—"At one of those big dances or teas. They are always such crushes, you can't see anybody except the people you *know*——" from which speech it may be inferred the young lady was fast picking up the jargon of her kind. Cousin Dick had asked after her mother, expressing warm contrition for not having come to see her yet. On reaching home, he had of course found a great pile of work awaiting him; there had been a trip to Washington on a case before the Supreme Court in connection with the business which had necessitated his European journey; he really had not had a minute he could call his own. He and Cecilia spoke about it over and over again, but she had been waiting for him to come with her, etc., etc. Natalie's mother listened with a smooth, indecipherable countenance as the girl repeated what excuses she could remember; it was evident that Natalie did not attach much importance to them or indeed to the whole subject of calls from Cousin Cecilia or anybody else. Like the rest of her circle she had no time, and as she herself would have said nowadays, "no use" for such prim observances.

Notwithstanding all the apologies, it was some weeks before they again heard or saw anything

of the Meryons. But one day toward the end of January there drove up to Number 12 Church Street, a nice automobile wherefrom descended a lady of corresponding appearance—she had been guiding it herself in a highly capable, workman-like manner—who went up the walk and rang the bell with swift and assured movements. In another moment she was coming up the stairs—the Stevens' had the uppermost "Saint Louis"—and she was not yet at the top when she cried out a greeting; she had a clear and ringing voice, extraordinarily suggestive of health, cheerfulness and amiability.

"Cousin Judith! Here I am at last! I suppose you thought I was never coming! I've been meaning to right along, but there's a place that's paved with good intentions—maybe you've heard that saying? It's almost impossible to get through what one has to do, and you feel as if you were actually stealing the time to go and see people when there is so much important, necessary work to be done—is this the daughter that's such a wonderful violinist? Oh, yes, you *are*! I've heard about you from Dick, and he's a judge; he's so musical himself it's a shame he's never had it cultivated, and besides he wouldn't say anything

if it wasn't his honest opinion. Oh, isn't your flat nice? Such a pleasant outlook!"

"We like it very much," said Mrs. Stevens. "You'll have a cup of tea with me? I'm afraid Natalie has to go out——"

Mrs. Meryon said heartily that that was all right, Natalie must go by all means, never mind *her*! She took off her wrap and gloves; Natalie murmured something about being very sorry, with attentive eyes—more attentive than her elders generally commanded. Cousin Cecilia was about thirty, plump and pretty, with a bright color, brown eyes, regular features and a radiant smile. She had small, chubby, dimpled hands; and beautiful small feet in buckled pumps. She was handsomely dressed in brown cloth with a velvet hat in harmonious shades of russet, and not too fanciful embroideries; there was a matching beaded bag, a brilliant trifle of a wrist-watch. And at this last she now glanced, at the same instant that she was talking, looking at the two others, and about the room and out of the windows; she even gave the stem of the watch a twist or two. It was an amazing performance, considering the incapacity of the average person to do more than one thing at once.

"I must fly myself directly, so I know you'll excuse my keeping my eye on the time," she explained. "I have a meeting of the Civic Improvement Society at half past four. If you could just wait a minute, Natalie, I could run you around to wherever you're going, if it's on my way."

"Oh, thank you so much, but Marian's going to stop for me—Marian Macready, I mean. And it's way out beyond the North Hill at The Warren, you know."

"Oh, Miss *Macready*. Oh, the *Warren*," said Mrs. Meryon, with a slight, indescribable, yet definite alteration in voice and manner as her eyes traveled over Natalie with a suggestion of some sharper or more critical interest. "That's that club? Well, good-bye! Have a good time! You're certain to have a lively one!" she said with emphatic significance. And the Macready car setting up a brisk honking to advertise its arrival at that moment, Natalie whisked off. The door downstairs closed behind her, and they could hear challenging young voices from the street.

"That young crowd certainly do run around perfectly wild, don't they?" Mrs. Meryon observed. "Every party they have all the men are

drunk before the evening's over, and half the girls. You heard about their all going on a regular spree the other night at that Warren club—the one Natalie's going to now—you heard about their tearing the prisms off the chandeliers and throwing them at one another? Some of them got badly cut with the broken glass, they say. Well, that's just one of the results of the war, Cousin Judith, that craze for excitement among the young people. Everybody says it will pass off after a while. I suppose you've found a great many changes, though?"

Mrs. Stevens did not immediately reply; she was seriously occupied measuring the tea out of a little old silver caddy into the teapot of Chinese porcelain. "I've found some," she said at length, in her gentle, deliberate voice and smiled agreeably at her guest. "Dick wasn't married when I went away." She finished the measuring operation and began another with the kettle of boiling water. "It's very nice to see him so ideally happy," and she smiled upon Mrs. Meryon again.

The other's kind, open face flushed and brightened; it was pretty to see, and it was also somehow a little pitiable, Judith Stevens thought, watching her. "Oh, I think it's so sweet of you

to tell me that!" she exclaimed impulsively. "Dick and I *are* wonderfully congenial, and he's perfectly devoted to me, and we *are* happy, though of course we don't go round showing it off, and wearing our hearts on our sleeves—you know that old saying?—so I'm sure most people take us for an ordinary, humdrum, married couple. You saw a great deal of Dick on the steamer? He's generally so reticent and has such wonderful self-control, that outsiders think him cold, but when he reveals his *true* heart you know, it—well, it goes down awfully deep. You've seen that side of his nature, though; I know he would talk to *you*. He thinks everything in the world of 'Cousin Judith.'"

"Dick's a dear fellow," said Mrs. Stevens with sincerity. "I've always been very fond of him."

"Everybody is that knows him at all," his wife asserted with an almost maternal pride. "And they all have so much confidence in his judgment, too. I've had people say to me: 'Your husband's got a real *head* on his shoulders, Mrs. Meryon!' People that had got to knowing him well, you know. You'd be surprised if you knew the number in this town, I mean *men*, that go to him

for advice. Not just law alone, but lots of things like life-insurance and investments and what doctor to go to and things like that. Of course I hear it from outsiders; Dick never says a word about business at home, though I've always tried to be an inspiring influence in his life, the way a man's wife should. But there're people that scarcely do a thing, absolutely not one *thing*, without asking him first—big, solid, business men, too, not the happy-go-lucky rich kind, you know. The spenders that haven't any idea where the money comes from, like that Macready crowd. You've seen that Mr. Macready that affects to be so English?"

"He *is* English," said Mrs. Stevens, mildly remonstrant. "I don't think there is any affectation about it."

"Oh! Well, everybody laughs at him, anyhow. Englishmen are so funny. They simply *never* change. So conservative and unprogressive! Dick said they were on the boat with you coming over, so I suppose you couldn't help getting acquainted?"

There occurred another short pause while Mrs. Stevens' thin, ladylike hands moved tranquilly about among the silver and china. She filled and

held out the other's cup before she said: "Why, we happened to know one another already. Mrs. Macready belongs here, she was a Miss Meigs——"

"Oh, I know, one of that Meigs family," Cecilia interrupted. "Mrs. Henry D. Meigs has that immense place out on the North Hill. Everybody says it's a good thing she's so rich with that worthless son she's got, Donelson Meigs, you know. He's the most *dissipated*—oh, everybody knows it. He always has been all his life, and he isn't young any more, but he still keeps it up. As long as his mother lives, of course, there will be plenty of money, but everybody says when she dies, *look out!* Don Meigs will run through everything."

"I've always rather liked him," said Mrs. Stevens, pensively stirring her tea. "Don't you?"

"Oh, I don't know him. I don't know any of them," said the other hastily.

And why should the pause that again ensued have seemed somehow a little chilly? Mrs. Stevens sipped her tea with a certain air of amiable relish, which, however, did not last long. She recognized the necessity, as she put it to her-

self, of "scrabbling around for something to say!"

"You have a young girl in your family just out, too, this winter? Natalie spoke of meeting her." (*And that's a tarraddiddle, but I have to keep things going somehow*, she added privately.) "It's delightful, even if it is sometimes a little fatiguing, don't you think?"

This, while a fair shot, did not score the bull's-eye as had some of her previous efforts; for Mrs. Meryon's reply lacked the innocent and happy enthusiasm they had evoked. "You mean Marjorie? Yes, she's home this winter. She graduated——" Cecilia corrected herself. "She *was* graduated *from* Wellesley last year. But Marjorie isn't crazy about society the way some girls are, Cousin Judith. She's not that kind. She seriously wants to do something with her life—and then, you know, it costs so much," said Cecilia, insensibly abandoning a faintly superior tone, to enter into practical considerations. "Dick wanted to give her a coming-out party, but I thought we'd better not. He's lovely to Marjorie just the same as if she were one of his own relations instead of mine." Her face flushed again with tender pride merely to name her husband,

merely to tell the tale of his virtues once more. The momentary hostility—to call it that—passed off under the spell; she chatted on freely and confidently as before. “Marjorie’s a splendid character—and when you think how young she is, barely twenty-two! But she’s always been that way, so strong and high-minded, you know. Even when she was a little thing she used to say she was going to go after the bigger things of life when she grew up, she didn’t mean to be a mere shallow society girl. And I know she *will* do something, she has such determination and such a fine mentality. She’s studying social science now; she’s always studying something. She says she’s not sure whether she’ll make it her career, but I wouldn’t be surprised. Anyhow, she wants to go to Europe to study their methods. I suppose you could tell her something about that, the best places to go, I mean?”

“Why—why, I’m afraid not, I’m afraid I wouldn’t be much use,” stammered Mrs. Stevens, unconscionably taken aback. She had piloted people to dressmakers and corsetières, conducted negotiations with dealers in antiquities, arranged for quarters at *pensions*, furnished addresses of music-teachers, art-schools, dentists, instruc-

tors in languages innumerable times, but never, never had she been called upon for information about social science courses! "I—I don't quite know what it is, even. I've been away from home for so long——" She felt as if her ignorance was little short of criminal, and yet was conscious of a perverse inclination to laugh.

"Why, you don't mean to say they don't have social science over there?" ejaculated the other in shocked astonishment. "Well, they *are* behind us, aren't they? It's—er—it's slum-work, only not *quite*, you know. I mean that's not all of it. It's with delinquents and degenerates and undeveloped people, and there's a good deal of psychology mixed in; you have to understand it so as to work with them. Don't they do *anything* of that kind in European countries?"

Mrs. Stevens recovered. "Oh, yes, I'm sure they do, but I don't know that they have courses of study, or any particular method. At any rate I don't think they call that sort of thing social science; I think they call it charity and philanthropy. That amounts to about the same thing, doesn't it?"

"Oh, *no*, Cousin Judith, not *nowadays*, not with *us*! It's a standardized science, you know

we standardize everything. It's the only way to get things done right."

"Well, I—I haven't been in a position to know much about it," said Mrs. Stevens lamely, with an increasing consciousness of guilt accompanied incomprehensibly by an increasing desire to laugh; the latter, in fact, nearly mastered her. She had to smile in a carefully deprecatory manner. "Natalie's music——"

"Oh, of course! You naturally had to be in an entirely different atmosphere," said Cecilia leniently. "I didn't stop to think about that." She gave a little cry of consternation. "Here I've been talking about nothing but home things all the time, and haven't heard a word about your life over there? It must have been *fascinating* during the war. I did want to go so much, to work for the 'Y,' you know, or anywhere, but I felt it wouldn't be right to leave Dick. He *depends* so on me. It was the greatest sacrifice I ever made. I think he realizes it, though he doesn't say anything. And you saw it all!" She looked at the other with something as near envy as her generous disposition could entertain. "It must have been *marvelous*!"

"We had to stay," said Mrs. Stevens; for once

her agreeably composed features betrayed strong feeling. "It was not marvelous. It was terrible."

"Yes, that's what every one says. The atrocities and everything. Oh, I should have loved to have had your opportunities!" Cecilia sighed. "Where were you? Near the front?"

"No. We were in France; we lived at several places, one after another, wherever we could. It was terrible," the older woman reiterated. She did not want to smile now; she had a strange sensation of beating against some viewless rock that defeated her utmost effort. The old impotent wrath, the anguished pity and horror of those black days returned upon her strongly. She made a shrinking gesture. "I can't bear to think about it, even now."

The other listened avidly. "Well, I had to miss it!" she said with another sigh of unaffected regret. "I thought it was my duty to stay at home. But I'm sure it will be perfectly wonderful hearing you, some day when we have more time so you can go into details——" She glanced at her watch, and exclaimed again, jumping up: "Gracious, my meeting! I nearly forgot! It's been your fault, Cousin Judith, you're too entertaining!" she said and gave Mrs. Stevens' arm

a playful squeeze. "Now I've got to go, and I'm fairly bursting to hear more. Oh, I'll tell you what let's do! You put on your things and come with me. *Do!* The meeting will interest you *intensely*, I *know* it will! So different from anything you've had over there. And I know you'll love to meet our board. They're all our most prominent women—Mrs. Clapp, Mrs. Middlebury Russell, *that* kind, you know. And then on the way you can tell me more about your war experiences. *Do!*"

Mrs. Stevens, however, excused herself on the score of having to be at home when Natalie came back; some other day—she had not yet met Mrs. Clapp, Mrs. Russell, but——

"Well, I know you'd enjoy them. Mrs. Russell's our president, she has the most brilliant executive mind I ever came in contact with. You *must* come some time, and I want to take you to the Women's Club, too, some day, when something's going on, a lecture or something, you know." And with many more hospitalities of the same description left hanging, as it were, Cecilia took her leave, beamingly, as she had come. Two or three days afterward, the Stevens' received another invitation from their Meryon relatives,

but this time in a concrete form; Dick wanted them to come to dinner, Cecilia imparted to them over the telephone. Of course she wanted them too, she said with laughter, but Dick *insisted!* He was crazy to see them, he really had *raked her over the coals* for not making an engagement with them when she was there. Fancy Dick getting mad about a thing like that! Generally speaking men were only too glad to be let off from dinners, you know; but of course this was different. So you see they *had* to come, and how about Thursday night? Oh, well, a week from Thursday then? Dick *said* they would probably have dates way ahead, particularly Natalie—these *society* girls! He was going to get hold of some of their steamer party, it seemed as if it would be a good deal of fun to have them all together again. Well, a week from Thursday, that would be lovely, so glad they could come!

IV

THE Meryons' house had been built of recent years, and according to Cecilia its architecture was the "simplest possible Colonial." There were systematically placed windows with sashes in six panes, woodwork painted white, locks and hinges reproducing charming eighteenth century modes in hardware, lighting-fixtures that simulated the candelabra of the same era. The living-room and dining-room were disposed respectively on this hand and on that as you entered in the authentic fashion; the stairs ascended correctly to a landing and Palladian window; but at the rear end of the hall, in defiance of precedent, Cecilia insisted on the introduction of a diminutive room which was to be Mr. Meryon's study. She had theories to which she lived up devoutly about a husband's rights, and about the care and thoughtfulness with which a wife should cater to his every desire and if practicable anticipate it. Besides, it was so interesting to fit up the study. She followed, with some modifications, for she believed also in

individuality and self-expression, a sketch with an accompanying article, "Suggestions for a Man's Room," which she found in *American Arts and Homes*. Shelves built around a corner for his books were one feature; and there was a desk of peculiarly massive and stately construction. The "little touches of her own," to quote again, comprehended a wrought-iron desk-set of sixteen pieces and a tall vase in which there was always to be a single flower. When the decorating was completed nothing could have been more imposingly studious looking; and this character should have endured, for it was never impaired by use. Dick did not study in the study; he duly admired it, duly caressed Cecilia for having planned it, but it is doubtful if he ever entered it again after the first time when she displayed it to him with delighted pride and expectation. Had he been asked he would probably have explained that he did all his work at his office, and that it was much more convenient to have everything in one place; but in point of fact Cecilia never asked. For her the existence of the study as an evidence of her watchful solicitude sufficed; that he never used it nowise mattered. In the course of time it became a repository for household tools, trays of sprout-

ing plants, out-of-date magazines—among them many numbers of *American Arts and Homes*—casual bundles awaiting shipment or just received; and although the command to put such and such an article in “the study” was almost daily on her lips, it had no more significance for Cecilia than if she had said the attic. She was occupied and active with concerns of importance, and had long ago forgotten about the first purpose of the study, forgotten even her first pleasure in it. “Oh, the house is an old story to me now!” she would say with a laugh. “Of course, I was crazy about it in the beginning. But one has enough to do nowadays keeping things clean and fussing at the furnace-man and the laundress and all the rest of them without spending hours over the color-scheme of your guest-room the way I used to. At that, I don’t have as much trouble with my housekeeping as most people; we go to a cafeteria or somewhere for our meals when it’s the cook’s day out—I give her two a week, you’ve got to keep them contented *somehow*, you know—and I always have in somebody extra when we have company. I believe in making a *home*. I always say when I hear people talking about careers that the finest career in the world

is the domestic one, being contented under your own roof with your husband and being willing to cook for him and do all the other plain, practical things, instead of running around to the movies or to society functions all the time. But Dick insists on my going out; he doesn't want me to be tied down."

Mrs. Stevens murmured inarticulately but responsively; and the tall, stout gentleman with the menacing bald spot, who was also a party to these confidences, kicked an end of log into better position on the Colonial andirons, winked jovially at Natalie, and remarked that Cecie had the auto on the trot pretty steady, and he guessed she was keeping that in mind about not being tied down. The two Stevens ladies had found him there when they arrived the evening of the dinner, lounging with his heavy shoulders against the high mantelshelf to the imminent danger of the china vases, the pots of ivy, the candlesticks and photographs collected there. He straightened up at their entrance and Cecilia introduced him as "my brother John," whereupon he came forward and shook hands with both of them and looked at them with a friendly keenness while announcing that the rest of his name was Applegate.

“‘Brother John’ is all right, and personally I wouldn’t mind your calling me that way, but maybe it’s a little too folks-y for you right at the go-off,” he said with a parade of seriousness. He had a strong, shrewd, genial face that Mrs. Stevens liked.

“*John!* Oh, I know what you are talking that way for!” said Cecilia, with a sort of affectionate annoyance, glancing apologetically at the others. “He just says those crude things to tease me, Cousin Judith. Dick does too, sometimes.” She shook a playfully reproving finger at the men. “You’re bad boys, both of you, as bad as you can be!”

“I’d better go make the cocktails, hadn’t I?” said Dick, precipitately, and pulled out his watch with a nervous movement. “They’ll all be here directly.” He fumbled over some apologies, and got himself out of the room; it had the air of a flight. Judith Stevens, who in her way was a humane woman, had already begun some random small talk, in the middle of which she encountered Mr. Applegate’s disquietingly knowing eye, rather to her embarrassment. However, he resumed his lounge with his hands in his trouser-pockets, and after a while helped the conver-

sation along by asking who the other guests were.

"Why, it's some friends Dick made on the steamer—I scarcely know them, but of course one doesn't stand on ceremony," Cecilia said, with a certain importance of manner. "Mr. and Mrs. Lee——"

"Led Lee?" her brother queried indifferently. "If it's him, I know him."

"Why, yes! That is, the name is Ledyard Lee," said Cecilia, surprised and pleased. "Why, John, do you know them?"

"Yeah, I know *him*. He's been around here for years. Family's always been here, I guess."

"John knows *everybody*!" the sister told Mrs. Stevens with pride. "All the most prominent people here——"

"I know the men, of course," said John Applegate, interrupting not too patiently. "I couldn't be in business here for twenty years and not know 'em. But they're mostly prominent only round the waist-line." He laughed not so spontaneously as before, with an eye on Mrs. Stevens. "I understand Led's got a new wife—I mean they're just married, aren't they?"

"Yes, last summer, I believe. They were com-

ing home from the wedding-trip when we met them. She's very charming."

"That so? Why, old Led isn't so slow, after all!"

"Dick thought it would be fun to get all your steamer crowd together," Cecilia went on, explaining. "Not the Macreadys——" she interrupted herself hastily. "It would have made too much of a table-full, and in our simple little Colonial home, you know—— But that Mr. Harkness, the one whose father is worth such millions, *that* one, you know, he's coming. And Marjorie—my niece, Marjorie Applegate, I mean, of course. And then I invited somebody expressly for *you*, Cousin Judith—well, for her, too, of course, but I know you'll love to meet her, I know you'll enjoy each other. It's Mrs. Gumble—*Mrs. Jessie Slayter Gumble!*" Cecilia intoned the name impressively, yet with a modestly proprietary air; one divined that, in this instance, the glory of the entertained illuminated and perhaps enhanced the value of the entertainer. "I know her *well!*"

Mrs. Stevens breathed, "Oh, *do* you?" with an appropriate emotion, in something of a panic, meanwhile lest she should inadvertently betray

the fact that she had never heard of the celebrity—for obviously Mrs. Gumble must be a celebrity. But Mr. Applegate unwittingly saved the company this unbecoming revelation by inquiring bluntly who *she* was?

“John Applegate! *Mrs. Gumble!* You know as well as anybody!”

“No, I don’t. She’s a new one on *me!*”

Cecilia gave Mrs. Stevens a glance of amiable despair. “*Men*, Cousin Judith! He really doesn’t know; he’s not joking.” She addressed her brother patiently and painstakingly. “It’s *the* Mrs. Gumble, John; the one who conducts the Current Events classes. *Now* do you know?”

“Nope. But I’ll take your word for it,” said John with maddening good-humor. “Mrs. Gumboil’s a lady high-brow, hey? Gumble, *Gumble?* Oh, all right!” He grinned at Mrs. Stevens and Natalie, including them both in one comprehensive wink that exhibited a reliance on their sympathies which the older woman found a little embarrassing. Men *are* tactless sometimes, she said to herself uneasily.

“If you mean that she is one of the most brilliantly intellectual women in the country, you are quite correct in calling her a high-brow, John,”

said his sister warningly. "Only I do hope you won't go on in this way to her face. I know you just mean to be funny, but Mrs. Gumble might not think so. You'll soon find out anyhow! She has a perfectly masculine grasp of subjects and she'll interest even *you*. I've heard men say that she has the finest sense of humor they ever saw in a woman. That shows you!" Cecilia gave him up and turned to the others again. "I suppose you've heard her, Cousin Judith? Oh, you haven't? Well, never mind. She's very sweet and gracious and approachable, and never lets anybody feel embarrassed because of not being a subscriber to the course. She puts you at your ease marvelously. I always say that's a gift; it's personality *plus*, you know. I must see if I can't get you a visitor's ticket. If you hear her once you'll never miss another chance. Of course, she won't talk in her platform way to-night; I just asked her to come as a *friend*."

Mrs. Stevens had recourse to some more indistinct and fragmentary civilities, without departing from her usual appearance of amiable interest, though in truth she was not thinking about Current Events or Mrs. Gumble, or even about Cecilia. Long practice enabled her to preserve

a convincing semblance of listening intelligently while her mind was elsewhere, and just now it was occupied with uneasy conjectures, some of which hovered, in a manner of speaking, over the Lees and some over Natalie. She wondered what her daughter was thinking; and finding it impossible to judge from the girl's pretty and correct exterior, was divided between amusement, pride, and a lurking disquiet at the success of her own efforts. It was infinitely reassuring to observe that Natalie could be relied on to commit no awkwardness, but what was going on within that little head artlessly bound with a fillet of tulle and tinsel leaves? She sat in the corner of the big lounge, her glance straying about the room, and from one to another of them without the faintest hint of curiosity or criticism, as engaging, as actually inscrutable as Judith herself, the work of whose hands she was. Yet now she was laughing as openly and wholeheartedly as any champion of ingenuousness could wish at some pleasantry of Mr. Applegate's. If it was ultra-sophistication, it was at least agreeable and not indefensible, the mother thought.

Marjorie Applegate came running from across

the street with a rush of cold air, a high exchange of greetings with her aunt and much laughing consternation over the particles of soiled and half frozen snow picked up by her satin slippers in transit. Cecilia looked her over and presented her with a fond pride in which Mrs. Stevens saw her own maternal feeling mirrored; the Meryon couple were not old enough to have children of Marjorie's age, but her attitude and theirs suggested a daughter of the house. She was a tall, well-developed girl with Cecilia's coloring and a good deal of her brave, straightforward manner, sweet and cheerful and somehow touchingly trustful and unsuspecting, Judith thought—and reproached herself the next instant for being a hardened worldling. Of what or of whom should they be suspicious, these kind, happy women? *They* were in no terror of giving themselves away, as Dick used to say. She watched the two girls meet, and saw nothing to find fault with in the demeanor of either; Cecilia, for her part, proclaimed aloud her conviction that they were going to be great friends.

"Marjorie isn't musical, but she *does* something, and it's always a bond when girls are doing something. It makes a meeting-ground, I

always say," she said to Mrs. Stevens in a half-aside, and the other agreed companionably, as was her wont.

Young Harkness arrived, dropped at the door from a passing motor-load of other youths. He, too, had to be introduced to Miss Applegate, and Mrs. Stevens had a moment of dread that he and Natalie might forget their manners and begin talking of things and places and people unfamiliar to the other girl. Men *are* tactless, and Natalie after all lacked the experience to understand and cope with certain situations. But she had to dismiss her apprehensions on their account, for another guest, the awaited and acclaimed Mrs. Jessie Slayter Gumble was now ushered in, and immediately in her wake the Ledyard Lees; and there was one final bout of introductions. Judith had a presentiment that it was going to demand all her force and finesse to get through the evening creditably.

Yet it would have been hard to assign a cause for misgiving. Mrs. Gumble was primed and willing, as was evident, to bear the social burdens of the entire roomful! The priestess of Current Events was all that Cecilia had described her, the most radiant personality — *plus* — imaginable.

She was richly caparisoned, like the war-steeds of knightly tales, with heavy panels, fringes and beads swaying about her, and carried off this accoutrement well, being of a fine, portly presence with wide white shoulders, white arms, white back. She had a delightful voice; her manner touched the zenith of what she herself called refinement. She embraced Cecilia, gave a hand to Mr. Meryon, who had just that minute reappeared, and accepted the presentation of Mr. Applegate with the utmost affability. Thus do the really great unbend! John, on his side, beginning with a loud and hearty statement that he was pleased to meet Mrs. Gumboi—broke down in incoherent mutterings terminating in a weird snorting sound which he all too plainly endeavored to convert into a cough. Cecilia was mortified, but the incident passed unnoticed, she hoped, among the conventionalities attendant on the other introductions. Mrs. Stevens, the two girls, Jack Harkness were brought up in turn, and Mrs. Gumble put them all at their ease—at any rate they had no aspect of being overcome by the momentous nature of the occasion. Inexplicably, she ceased for the fraction of a second to appear entirely at her own ease when meeting the Lees.

The heavy gentleman looked at her in his heavily gentlemanly way, uttered the commonplaces to be expected from him, and retired unimpressive and, strange to say, unimpressed. His wife, in one of her discreetly unusual toilettes, merely bowed and smiled; but somehow, irreproachable as were the bow, the smile, they operated to transform the celebrity for a flash into a mediocrity! The illusion came and went with magic swiftness; perhaps to some of those present it was no surprise. Cecilia Meryon's consciousness of it merged at once into a troubled resentment that settled upon Mrs. Lee, she herself did not know why. She told herself that she never *did* like that society crowd that Dick went with before they were married; anybody could see that this Mrs. Ledyard Lee, for instance, was nothing but a society woman like the rest of them, the vain, idle, selfish kind that all the New York novels are written about!

"It's perfectly lovely of you to come in this informal way, Mrs. Lee," she said, not quite in her natural voice. Mrs. Lee responded with no change in hers that it was lovely to be asked. And then, happily, the cocktails were brought, and they were of a strength to smooth away dif-

ferences of taste and opinion, or, as Mr. Applegate put it, to "limber everybody up."

Nevertheless, somehow or other, the evening was doomed to failure as the company ere long began to feel in proportion to its several dispositions and capacities. Mrs. Gumble, it was true, shone, but there were moments when even Cecilia, who was loyalty incarnate, wished uncomfortably that the illumination were not quite so pervasive and unremitting; after all, Mrs. Gumble had been invited only as a *friend*. Why was it that these gifted people did not appear at their best when one most wanted them to? Somebody must be to blame, but against her will she realized the injustice of attributing the spent-rocket feebleness of some of the celebrity's efforts to Mrs. Lee's baneful presence; and that consciousness, unreasonably enough, enlivened Cecilia's dislike. It gave her no satisfaction to observe that Mrs. Lee and Dick and her brother John, in distinction to the rest, were apparently having a very good time at their end of the table. Instead, their detachment irritated her by subtly hinting at mutual tastes and pursuits and understandings peculiar to the artificial life of which *that woman*—by this time Cecilia was inwardly referring to the other as

that woman—was a typical exponent. On the other hand, here was Mr. Lee, also a member of the tabooed, or tabooing, circle, the most agreeable of dinner guests, unflinchingly eating everything, even the underdone sweetbreads that Cecilia herself could barely manage, straight through from beginning to end with a gratifying appearance of relish, not saying much, to be sure, but a deep thinker, she was persuaded. And she prided herself on being able to discern the irony of his being linked to that trivial butterfly of a wife; it justified her in the belief that she was a judge of human nature. And here likewise was Cousin Judith, whom she had suspected of being another *society* woman, now showing herself as plain and easy as an old shoe! Cecilia warmed to her from that moment.

In fact, Judith was doing yeoman service with a genuine kindness of intention which ought to set off whatever element of hypocrisy there was about it. Mrs. Gumble's brilliancies bored her; she was (doubtless unwarrantably) nervous about Dick, whose "good time" was by far too obviously and easily accounted for, to Judith's experienced perceptions; her neuralgia was coming on; in fine, she would have given nearly any-

thing in this world and certainly everything in the next, about which, lamentable to relate, she did not entertain great hopes, to be at home and in bed. Yet there she sat, sympathetic and appreciative, listening without interruption, unerringly smiling at the right moment and keeping herself from smiling at the wrong one, a martyr to what may have been an ignoble cause. It was one of those humble miracles of good breeding which, to some minds, excel the performances of a good heart.

The young people were keeping up a sufficient animation, she noticed with relief; and Mrs. Lee, to do her justice, was dividing herself between her host and her fellow guest, Mr. Applegate, to the best of her ability. As for Dick—but presently they would be at the coffee, and when everybody got up to go into the other room, some changes of neighbors and regrouping would be unavoidable even if Dick did not realize what his duties were and the value of appearances. But pshaw, she added to herself impatiently, watching him, how could he be expected to be circumspect when, with his masculine obtuseness or his queer, defenseless, masculine innocence, he did not dream that there was any need for circumspection? He

would undoubtedly be astounded and highly indignant to be told that Mrs. Ledyard Lee was anything more to him than a pleasant acquaintance. Well, perhaps she wasn't; perhaps she merely recalled to him days and ways antedating Cecilia; and perhaps she, Judith Stevens, had lived too long in countries where marital fidelity was always under suspicion. At any rate, in all conscience, she did not have to charge herself with the job of keeping Dick Meryon from philandering; that was his wife's business, if anybody's. It looked as if Mrs. Lee's prudence could be trusted, and as long as Cecilia continued happily unaware, no harm was being done.

Notwithstanding these cynical conclusions, she beckoned Dick to her side when they reached again the big sofa in the living-room, making place for him pointedly. "Do come here and talk to *me* now! Remember cousinly affection and family ties and all that!"

Mrs. Lee said she had heard a theory advanced that they flourished best under a system of judicious neglect; and before Cecilia could express a polite (of *course* a polite) disagreement, her brother intervened on the other's side. (That was what an hour of *that woman's* shallow, **showy**

talk had done to him! You would think he could see that it was all for *effect*, but men are so blind!)

"That's so! You don't want to have too much to do with your folks," said he seriously. "Lots of divorces could be staved off if more people acted on that principle."

"You mean husbands and wives, Mr. Applegate?"

"No. Husbands and wives aren't *folks*," said John quite honestly. Then, perceiving that this had an epigrammatic sound and that Mrs. Lee was laughing with unaffected relish, he laughed, too, not ill pleased with himself. Cecilia pressed her lips together, silently pouring the coffee. No matter how offensively light a tone the conversation may take, you can say nothing at your own table, under your own roof; you have to show your disapproval in other ways, for example by deliberately changing the subject.

"You play bridge, Mr. Lee?"

"No. My wife does, but it's beyond me," said Ledyard placidly. "I'm not much good at cards. Have you tried that new solitaire, by the way? The one where you lay out eleven cards, you know? I could show you in a minute. It's a hard one to get and that makes it interesting, don't you

think? So many of them are all luck and no judgment required——”

“Mrs. Gumble plays a very fine game—of auction, I mean. Oh, yes, you *do*, too; you know you do. The men all think so.”

“I’m sure they do,” said Mrs. Lee unexpectedly. “Who was it the other day that was saying——” She appeared to search her memory. “Mr. Austin? You’ve played with him?”

“Yes, *indeed!* We had the most delightful game! Of course he’s a very inspiring partner,” said Mrs. Gumble, and paused expectantly; but, as the other’s memory seemed to be again in need of prompting, pursued rather coyly: “I hope he wasn’t too hard on *my* poor little efforts?”

Mrs. Lee happened to be taking a sip of coffee, but contrived to meet the other lady’s interrogative gaze with smiling, non-committal eyes over the rim of the cup.

“What did he say?” Mrs. Gumble was at length driven to ask outright.

“Oh, he didn’t really say anything, he just laughed,” said Anita Lee brightly; and finished the coffee and put down the cup before she added: “So you can see he must have had a nice time and enjoyed the game thoroughly.”

Her manner was so disarmingly innocent that for one instant Mrs. Stevens hoped what significance this remark held would escape notice; but she saw the color spreading over poor Mrs. Gumble's well-powdered countenance, and rushed into the breach with something about yesterday's symphony concert. It was inadequate, but the best she could do on such short notice, she thought, suppressing an untimely smile, nowise aided by encountering a lightning wink from Mr. Applegate over the celebrity's head. Dick helped out with rather too profuse regrets that Natalie had not brought her violin.

"But I don't *ever*!" she protested in surprise. "One doesn't go around——"

"No, I know. But I wished we'd asked you to, even if it would have been something of an imposition. You can play that Sarasate music, that gypsy dance, can't you? The one he played?" said Dick, alluding to the concert soloist. "I'd like to hear it again."

"Would you, Cousin Dick? Why, I'll play it for you some time. I'd love to," said Natalie simply. Cecilia, remembering the virtuoso-testing character of the Sarasate composition, was all at once invaded by a dislike for the girl, the more

acid, perhaps, because she knew it to be unreasonable, merely diverted from its real object, Mrs. Lee. She said to herself that Natalie's simplicity was nothing but an affectation, an attitude assumed because she thought it looked well. Really important people always behaved importantly. Mrs. Gumble was an instance; she knew that to belittle herself would not be modesty, but bad taste. Cecilia herself never made any pretenses about anything; everybody knew where to put *her*, Cecilia Meryon. Whereas that Mrs. Lee and all her kind, so pleasant and smooth on the surface, could not be relied on for one minute. All *that woman* thought of was making a favorable impression on men. Look at Dick and John, how she was taking them in!

Marjorie was speaking. "Did I leave my red scarf here the other day, Aunt Cecie?"

"It's in the study," said Cecilia mechanically.

Now what malign influence was it that moved her to say that and thereby put it into Mrs. Lee's head to ask: "The study? Whose? Yours?" She looked at Dick with curiosity spiced with amusement; it was altogether too intimate a look in the opinion of that middle-aged Mrs. Polonius, Judith Stevens; but she reflected callously that

Cecilia would not so interpret it. Cecilia was as mad as a hatter already, so that nothing Mrs. Lee said or did could make matters much worse!

"Supposed to be, only I don't use it," Dick answered; and he added innocently: "My wife's idea. She went to a great deal of trouble fixing it up for me, and I ought to be ashamed of being so unappreciative. It's very pretty."

"Oh, *no*, Dick, it isn't any more, it's——"

"But I'm sure it's pretty. The whole house is."

"Oh, it's nothing but the simplest possible little Colonial house, Mrs. Lee. *We* wouldn't know what to do with ourselves in one of those great North Hill mansions," said Cecilia vindictively.

"We don't know what to do with ourselves in ours," Mrs. Lee said, and laughed. She and Ledyard had taken over the old Lee homestead, a perfect barracks of a place in the architectural style of 1880, about which time Lee senior made most of his money. Even their extensive and expensive remodeling could not render it picturesquely habitable as are the houses of to-day. It was a failure, Anita now avowed carelessly. "We want to build, and I'm making a collection of other

people's ideas. Show us your study, will you?"

"Why, of course——"

"Oh, no, Dick, *please!* I'm—I'm afraid it isn't in order——" But what was there to do? Here was something extra for which *that woman* was to blame. Dick led the way to the study, and directly returned for Mrs. Lee's wrap. It was cold in there, he said abruptly, the register had been turned off. Cecilia remembered dismally that the study had not been cleaned since she didn't know when!

Mrs. Lee stood shivering in the middle of it, her draperies elegantly held back from various damaging contacts. The table was crowded, but outlines printed in the dust gave a fair indication of the nature of more objects that had been there until recently. There was a chair waiting for the upholsterer's wagon. Bottles of furniture and brass polish, spare electric-light bulbs, coils of picture wire, an opened carton of tacks, a stack of wrapping paper salvaged from tradesmen's parcels, cumbered the shelves in lieu of books. In a corner, the tall vase destined for the single flower, its glass dimmed to a grayish drab, had been utilized by some resourceful charwoman to

hold a feather duster inserted handle down. "It doesn't look quite the way it did at first," Dick said, gazing around doubtfully, aware not so much of the disorder as of the manifest lack of comfort. "There used to be curtains, you know," he explained vaguely.

Anita surveyed the desolation impersonally; she may have been searching for some tactful comment, or she may have been—as it is to be feared was the case with her companion—increasingly conscious of their isolation. Neither of them had planned it; it had come about impromptu like all their encounters hitherto. A fanciful person might have argued that such chances are not normally in the game, that fate itself must serve the cards. "Oh, there's your cap, the one you wore on the boat!" was what she said at last, relieving the silence, yet wondering at herself in the act. Of all things to say——

"I must have thrown it in here." He looked at her with something in his face, all unknown to himself, that set her to questioning in a panic what had been the sound of her voice just now. No undue interest betrayed by it, surely? It seemed a whole minute before he added: "The idea of your remembering *that!*"

"Why not? Women always notice dress."

"Oh! Well, I feel flattered, anyhow."

"Men never know what a woman has on, do they?" said Anita, with more ease. "You only know when we look nice."

"Perhaps. Or when you look different, the—the way *you* do. That Chinese-y dress, you know? I suppose your things are in the style, but they never look like the other women's."

"This is a competition in trade-lasts, I perceive," said Anita, and they laughed in the silliest, most boy-and-girl fashion imaginable. The others could hear their voices; had the entire conversation been overheard, for that matter, it would have given no ground for scandalous report. The *General Jackson* experience seemed a long while ago, didn't it; quite in the dark ages? But what a nice crossing it had been! Such unusually nice people! The afternoon-tea hour in the lounge or around the decks had always been so pleasant, and helped to get through the time. In fact, afternoon tea was an admirable institution on sea or land. Mrs. Lee had it served every day, like everybody else on the North Hill; people dropped in, even men sometimes. Americans were really learning at last to take a little leisure

once in a while, what with the country clubs and golf and polo and tea. Everything but cricket, and we might come to that yet. Didn't Mr. Meryon play golf, or was he one of the terribly busy ones? Oh, he got off sometimes——

And so on, and so on. It was not only innocuous but positively inane, depressingly so compared to the discussions going on in the living-room; for when they got back, after not more than a quarter of an hour or so, Mrs. Gumble had arrived at a second wind, so to speak, and was declaiming in her ample voice and something of her platform manner—considering that she had been invited as a friend—against certain foreign practices. "Trafficking in their young people, and selling the boys and girls right and left the way the French do! No such thing as personal preference, not to mention *love*, is countenanced, you know. It's all settled by the parents on a strictly commercial basis. Of course you must have seen a great deal of it, Mrs. Stevens. No French girl can get married without a *dough*, you know about *that*?"

"Eh?" said Judith, for once at fault. She was tired, and the other's large presence, her sonorous persistent eloquence seemed to fill the room and press on everybody like a weight. "Eh? Without a——"

"*A* dough? I guess you mean *the* dough, don't you?" John Applegate inquired.

"It *does* mean money! How'd you happen to think about *that*?" ejaculated Mr. Lee in astonishment and no little admiration. "Looked it up in the dictionary once," he explained laboriously. "They call it *dot*, just like that! I thought it was so funny I looked it up to make sure. It doesn't seem as if a word like that could possibly mean money, you know, now does it? I thought maybe they were pulling my leg, you know, but there it was in the dictionary, just as they said. *Dot*! French is an awfully funny language."

"Oh, *dot*! I don't speak French. I went over there and stayed the whole of last summer, traveling about, talking to people and making a study of social conditions. I had letters of introduction to some of the most prominent men and women, really *world figures*, many of them. I have been so fortunate that way," said Mrs. Gumble, with becoming modesty. "They all know that it's my profession and they're eager to assist me. I had an audience with the Pope that was *wonderful*. You can see that my opportunities were unusual, and I took every advantage of them." She spoke to Cecilia, who indeed was her most attentive

auditor. "The title of my address on that subject is: '*The Tie That Binds, as Our French Friends See It.*' I cover the whole ground, showing that it is scarcely reasonable to expect a decent observance of conjugal obligations from people mated in that sordid way. *Our* conceptions of marriage may not always be perfectly realized; we're such idealists, you know. But *we* look upon love between two young people as something too pure and noble and holy to be interfered with."

A moment of respectful silence followed, and then Dick remarked between the small movements of lighting a cigarette: "Well, they say statistics show we hold the record for divorce cases. That's something, too!" He blew a mouthful of smoke, grinning at his brother-in-law.

"Three cheers! We lead where others follow!" the latter responded promptly. Both gentlemen perhaps thought the conversation, or, to put it accurately, Mrs. Gumble's oratory, was taking too serious a turn. Cecilia desperately murmured an appeal to them not to be crude. But the celebrity was scarcely aware of the interruption, or humanely overlooked its frivolity. She challenged Mrs. Stevens: "Didn't you, as an Amer-

ican, find it revolting, that Turkish-harem attitude with their dough—dot?”

“No, I—I can’t say I ever saw anything revolting,” stammered Mrs. Stevens, rather perturbed, foraging among her recollections. “It seemed to me quite sensible, on the whole, for them to want their daughters to have a little money of their own, and we ourselves are generally better satisfied when the young man has a good position and prospects, aren’t we? I never thought French girls any more flirtatious than other girls, and as for the married women, there are always all kinds, you know. One always feels that theirs is a very old civilization compared to ours, and they seemed to have tried a great many things that are still new to us, and come to conclusions that we haven’t yet reached,” she suggested diffidently; Judith had no desire to enter the field of rotund and positive statement with Mrs. Gumble, being governed by a certain respect for other people’s drawing-rooms. “But then, I have never really been in a position to judge,” she wound up in an apologetic hurry.

“No, I don’t believe you ever were, Mrs. Stevens,” said Anita Lee in tones of gentle commiseration. “You’ve only lived over there ten

years or so, and Mrs. Gumble was studying their social conditions the whole of last summer, you know."

The evening broke up a short while later. The only person for whom it seemed to have been an unqualified success was the host. Dick was in astonishingly high spirits, and prodigal with words of satisfaction after the departure of their guests. Nice time they had all had! Nice young fellow Harkness was! And wasn't Cousin Judith a dear? He complimented Marjorie's dress, Cecilia's dress, the appearance of the house, the quality of the dinner—nothing escaped him.

"Well, I'm glad you think it was all right," said his wife without enthusiasm. "But another time I do wish you'd pay a little more attention. You *would* insist on showing off the study when you ought to have seen I didn't want you to. Of course I couldn't make a fuss, and stop you outright. If you would just pay a *little* attention! It's all upset in there——"

"Bosh, nothing's the matter with it!" Dick assured her, unconquerably good-humored. "And what difference would that make to Mrs. Lee, anyhow? I don't believe she noticed anything out of the way."

"I don't care what she noticed," said Cecilia inconsistently. "Anybody who would act the way she did in another person's house! You heard what she said to Mrs. Gumble. Positively insulting!"

"Good Lord, Cecie, it isn't an insult to hint to somebody that they can't play bridge," said her brother John, openly amused. "None of us would be on speaking terms if we got mad at things like that. Mrs. Gumble——"

"Nobody got *mad*, John; Mrs. Gumble and I are both above it, I hope. But I simply made up my mind right then and there that I'd never have *her* in my house again!"

"Make it unanimous!" said John facetiously. "Kind of heavy, wasn't she? And, by jiminy, did you hear me come within an ace of calling her Gumboil?" Mr. Applegate went through a pantomime of wiping the perspiration from his brow. "Narrowest escape I ever had!"

"Oh, John, I don't mean *her*, you know perfectly well! I mean that Mrs. Lee. She's just like all the rest of that society crowd on the North Hill. I don't suppose she ever reads a book or makes the slightest attempt to improve or *widen* herself, or acquire any *culture*, or be of any use.

How they can do so little with their lives passes me! To be satisfied with being nothing but *social butterflies*——”

“Oh, well, we’re all tired, let’s go to bed!” said Dick, unceremoniously beginning to turn out the lights. All the good-humor was gone from his voice.

Meanwhile the guests, as guests will, were indulging in some exchange of views about their hosts; doubtless they had a pretty good guess that they themselves were being talked over, and the same sauce does for the goose and the gander as all the world knows. Nevertheless, Mrs. Lee was much less caustic than Mrs. Meryon, though the latter could not have been coerced into believing it. Anita did not lay down any embargoes, she did not enter into uncomplimentary personalities; in fact, she hardly referred to the other women at all. It was Ledyard who said: “Meryon’s wife is very pretty, isn’t she? I never met her before.” He halted in some mental effort. “I didn’t know Applegate was her brother—didn’t connect them at all. It’s not a very common name, Applegate.”

“I thought *he* was a good deal of fun,” said his wife. “Let’s have him out at the house some

time, Led. To dinner or something." She, too, paused. "It's queer how much better the men are than the women among people like that."

Ledyard Lee stirred uneasily. Something about the speech disturbed him, he did not know how or why. It may have been that deep in his honest heart and quite independent of his none-too-well-dowered head, there abode a formless conviction that one ought not to eat people's bread, and utter ungracious words about them afterward. He could not have understood such a phrase as *noblesse oblige* with all its implications, yet he could live up to it in his simple fashion. He admired his Anita with all the force of his being, and it may have pained him to glimpse the clay feet of the idol; but he was helplessly inarticulate. "Funny I never placed Applegate in connection with Dick Meryon," he repeated. "I'd heard his wife's name used to be Applegate, and it's not an ordinary name at all. I'll look up the Applegates in the telephone book, and count them. It's interesting how much you can be mistaken about names. I made a bet with a man once that there were more Smiths than Johnsons. Thought I had a cinch, but d'you know he won after all! Afterward we compared the

Whites and Browns and Joneses—names like that, you know. And it was perfectly surprising how much one could be mistaken.”

Mrs. Stevens and her daughter drove almost all the way home in silence. “What is Miss Applegate like?” the mother asked experimentally at length.

“Why, I don’t know. I mean——” Natalie did not seem at once able to impart what she meant; she made two or three false starts. “She’s been at college. She says you can’t get anything to do anywhere unless you’ve been to a college and have graduated. And she says it helps a great deal to belong to a society—no, that’s not it—a sorority!” said Natalie triumphantly, though evidently more than a little puzzled. “They have Greek letters—the initials of something, of course. She’s a K. K. E. They all wear little blue and gold enamel pins.”

“Yes. What do they do?”

Natalie had every appearance of being gravely again! “I don’t know exactly, but she said they had lovely times at the sorority houses at college, you know. She said you didn’t have nearly so good a time if you didn’t belong to one. You know, mother,” said Natalie earnestly, “I

thought college was an awful grind of hard work, and that that was what you went there for, but Marjorie says it isn't at all. It's lots of fun, and she says nobody would go to college if they didn't have a good time!" She spoke a little wistfully. "I wish I could have gone to one—here at home, I mean. It was so different over there; everybody thought they had to study, and they didn't do anything else! And I don't suppose I could get a job"—Natalie no longer said "chub" these days!—"if I were to try. I've never graduated anywhere, and I can't do anything except play the violin. Marjorie says it's an awful pity. She specialized in social science. Everybody specializes in something."

"The violin appears to me something of a specialty," said Mrs. Stevens drily. "Did you talk about colleges and Greek-letter sororities all evening?"

"Yes, most of the time. It was interesting because I didn't know anything about it, you see. Even Mr. Harkness didn't know as much as Marjorie. They have Greek letter clubs for men, too, but not at his college. Marjorie's going to take me to her college club some day."

"That will be nice," said her mother, in a neu-

tral manner; all winter she had been cultivating neutrality as regarded Natalie's impressions, not without some effort and self-restraint. And it was with an indescribable mingling of relief, regret, and the sense of responsibility lifted that she heard the girl's next words:

"But oh, mother, poor Cousin Dick! Wasn't it dreadful?"

V

A GENERATION ago, before outdoor sports, landscape gardening and country houses on the romantic order came in fashion, the most important quarter of the town socially was that called the South End. It was not an end in the physical sense, since even in those days the city went on for a mile beyond it; but as defining the limits of the socially habitable district, the name was handsomely symbolic. Everybody that was Anybody lived in the South End within certain latitudes and longitudes; cross them, and you classified yourself with the Nobodies. The old Meigs house, the old Stevens house, the old Meryon house, not to mention a dozen others identified with families as well established, used to be in the South End; they all went down eventually before the rising tide of office buildings, factories, warehouses and cheap restaurants, at the same time that their owners, joining the general movement in the South End, migrated to the North Hill. There, like the race

noted for an earlier and more distinguished migration, they managed, though dispersed over a much wider territory, to keep their character intact, even to surround themselves with their native atmosphere; the Everybodies were still Everybody though hemmed in and impinged upon by aliens, some of whom, it must be acknowledged, won admittance with the passage of years. Instead of narrow, high-stooped houses, built shoulder to shoulder in imitation of New York, they mostly turned to ample stone chateaux set in lawns and stretches of woods. After a while, with the new century, the Country Club and links came into being; and a while later still the Warren and other semi-formal gathering places farther out toward the country. But in spite of the growth and the revolutionary social expansion on all sides of it, the North Hill continued to defy amalgamation; the Old Guard of Everybodies made there their last stand!

The Lee house antedated the migration by a few years, and, as Anita said, was hopeless architecturally; she and Ledyard would build, only it was so hard to find the right location. One did not want to be a pioneer in a new direction, and presently find oneself stranded in one of those

terrific suburban "neighborhoods." They would probably end by buying a country place, a real farm entirely out of town; or even by giving up living here altogether. She herself liked the Oyster Bay cottage, and would just as lief stay there the year round, instead of merely during the summer months; they could always come back here for a while if they felt like it and stop at one of the hotels. Didn't Mr. Meryon think that a good idea?

"It would be one solution, of course," Dick said, attempting a careless tone and not succeeding. He stared aggrievedly at the landscape which hereabouts, notwithstanding presumably greater difficulties in handling, had proved much more amenable to alteration than the monstrous, turreted, cupola-ed and porticoed house. Under the supervision of some metropolitan garden expert, it had become a pleasing mixture of French, Italian and eighteenth-century English motifs accommodated to the Ohio Valley climate and scenery. Embrasures amongst the grouped trees conducted the eye to a charming distant glimpse of the river here and there; elsewhere there were tall poplars in a file, with cedars, dark, columnar and dramatically placed; a bit of trellised brick wall

traversed the vista, there was a pool sunk level with the turf half in sunlight, half in shadow, reflecting iris and the vertical stems of reeds; and masses of verdure laced with bloom stooped around the borders, giving seclusion. In a paved arbor, decorative chairs and a little round painted table were arranged intimately, and Anita in a white dress and wide white hat poured tea. Mr. Meryon, in his golf clothes, must have been either going to or coming from the links; he had become a very earnest golfer that spring, out in all weathers and regularly reaching home late for dinner, and if sometimes he did not complete the round, if indeed he did not begin one, that is hardly a matter for comment. The game is no less discouraging than enthralling, and its neophytes are forever having good days, runs of luck, balanced by periods of exasperated renunciation. Dick, like the rest, by turns proclaimed gleefully a creditable score and declared in futile wrath that he would never touch a club again. Mrs. Lee seldom played, but their grounds adjoined the links on the far side, a mile from the club house, and many players were quite in the habit of breaking off at the ninth hole and adjourning for a cup of tea with her. Often Led-

yard, that good fellow, would mix them something stronger; it was voted a pleasant, easy-going household where you met everybody.

Not infrequently nowadays, people remarked also on the fact that Dick Meryon had come to life again! He seemed to have rather dropped out of things after his marriage, they said, but now was going everywhere as formerly. Whenever curiosity was expressed about Mrs. Dick, which was not often, it was stated by those who happened to have met her that she was very busy and prominent in all the women's clubs and movements; she held all kinds of secretaryships and presidencies; she was one of those representative women, in short. "The only trouble about them is that they *are* representative!" some cynic—it may well have been Donelson Meigs, it sounded like him—pointed out; and everybody laughed, because, properly delivered, the speech had a salt, witty, epigrammatic flavor. Cecilia, as may be inferred, was not one of those who played golf or dropped in for tea; she really never saw anything of the Lees after the latter punctiliously returned the dinner. Sometimes, between her multitudinous activities, or when the convenience of the current cook required that they must dine

at the cafeteria, she would run the neat little automobile out to the club to pick up Dick; and he was almost always there, waiting to be picked up, introducing, occasionally re-introducing, her to people whom Cecilia cordially disliked from that moment. They were such *butterflies*, in her opinion. Of them all, the only one who interested her, strangely enough, was Don Meigs, the reprobate, the spendthrift, the rake! At least Cecilia believed him to be such, and the belief, instead of repelling her, invested him with the lure which seems to be Vice's peculiar advantage over Virtue. Why not? After all, honesty and decency are very pedestrian qualities; any thoroughly good woman like Cecilia Meryon can tell you all about them. It is only evil that is mysterious and picturesque. Everybody at heart likes Mephistopheles, and who cares a thing on earth about those sterling characters, Valentine and Siebel, either one? Mr. Meigs did not look like Mephistopheles; he looked like any other American gentleman advancing toward middle age, who has seen the world. But Cecilia read depravity in his every word and glance, and was correspondingly intrigued. She had an idea that Dick had been the confidant of the other man's past, and

might even be of his present, which was doubtless equally nefarious according to Cecilia, and tried to wheedle the dark secrets out of him; but Dick, at first with laughter but finally in impatience, refused to be wheedled. He denied knowing anything about Donelson Meigs' history—strictly his amorous history, Cecilia did not care for anything else—adding rather harshly that if he did know, he wouldn't tell to have it gabbled over by a pack of scandal-loving women. It frightened Cecie a little, although she indignantly refuted the scandal-loving allegation. Scandal-loving, indeed! It was notorious that the North Hill fairly reeked with scandal, whereas *she* never repeated a thing, nor did her friends. However, the subject was dropped; her husband's manner had been too forbidding.

Perhaps Dick realized it, or realized by fits and starts, that he was sometimes hasty and moody and short-tempered these days; for between whiles, he would make atonement in a man's awkward and self-betraying way, buying her candy, taking her to the theatre, raising her allowance of spending-money, giving presents to Marjorie. As an ironic fate would have it, Cecilia scarcely noticed all these efforts; another woman, many

other women, might have been invaded by certain suspicions, but she was too secure in her innocently complacent self-approval. She forgave readily because she forgot so readily; she was used to liberality from him, to having her own way attended by a happy irresponsibility as to its results. Had he not always been the best, most generous, most wonderful husband in the world? And since, in her heart of hearts, Cecilia looked upon herself as a very superior sort of wife, it was obviously an ideal match, and they were almost an abnormally congenial couple; at any rate, that was her firm belief. She took considerable satisfaction in pitying all her friends, both men and women, for the lesser creatures they were mated with; and the keenest pleasure she got out of her husband's gifts and attentions was in boasting them whether in his presence or absence. There were terrible moments for Dick Meryon when he felt that he could hate her for her invincible trust in him; if she would only be violent, jealous, exacting, making his life a burden, all would be so much simpler, so much more excusable. Alas, do we not always hate the people whom we wrong?

In general, however, he succeeded without too

much difficulty, in putting her out of his mind altogether, as on this spring afternoon while he sat in the arbor across the table from Mrs. Lee, trying to catch her eyes, to make her look at him from under the protecting shadow of her big hat; the intuition that she was trying as steadily to evade him, drew his nerves taut. It was the first time her frank and spirited gaze had faltered; he was unconscious of the change in his own, so rigorously schooled hitherto. During all these months their unacknowledged yet never furtive intimacy had never been accompanied by soft words and glances; how could it have been when they incessantly repeated to themselves that they were merely good friends? They repeated it long after both secretly knew that they were not friends at all; and then each one separately invented and maintained with desperation the figment that the other did not know. What harm could come of it, the man whispered to the man, the woman to the woman, if the other did not know? But now, all at once, tacit admissions trembled in the air, resolves crumbled as they clutched at them. Perhaps it was the spring troubling their senses; there were winds at once light and languorous, caressing puffs of scent

from the garden. Its first showing of tender and virginal color was beginning to fade with that hint of wistfulness that the sight of petals helplessly falling always imparts. The rose that wreathed the gray stone newel of the sun-dial, yesterday a miracle of fresh, shell-pink delicacy, to-day trailed discolored tatters. Dick remembered the motto around the dial's face, *Carpe diem!* He had once offered to Anita the flippant translation: *Don't let a good thing get away!* But it was a sufficient philosophy, when all was said. Embrace the hour; it cannot last. And from the other end of the terrace a stone figure of Pan in a niche hung with darkly glossy ivy, grinned at them with pagan tolerance.

Anita, in fear of a silence that was already too long, too crowded with meaning, began to say something about the rose. It was a *Doctor van Fleet*, a wonderful thing, the only climbing rose one could cut for a bouquet——

"Why won't you look at me?" said Dick.

"Why, I *am* looking at you, I—I——"

Dick spoke in a low voice. The world did not rock around them, the heavens did not fall at the three words he uttered. The warm air sighed again seductively, the flowers exhaled warning

and regret with the same melancholy grace; Pan continued his jovial, understanding and conscienceless survey. "You knew?" said Dick. They must both have made some movement, for he added quickly, with an effort: "Don't be afraid! I'm not going to touch you. I—I wouldn't, you know, unless—unless you——" The sentence hung unfinished, but he was motionless in the chair, leaning forward with his strong, sunburned hands knotted together in a painful grip as if he would hold his resolution fast, visibly to both himself and her. "I couldn't help telling you. But you knew?"

"I—I suppose I did. It's wrong."

"I couldn't help myself. I know now it began the first time I saw you. Do you remember? On the boat? You looked at me. It began then, only I didn't know. I only thought you were different from every other woman in the world. Then, when I found out——" He unlocked his hands in a wild gesture of impotence. "Anita, I would give ten years out of my life——"

She got up hastily, moving a step away, trembling. "I know. But it's no use. Don't say any more, it's got to end. If you hadn't spoken—but it's got to end now."

The words were brave and determined, but something else, something in her voice, her averted face, her uncertain attitude, betrayed her; for Dick stood too, still with the table between them, still grasping at his self-control—what was left of it. “Do you care?” he managed to get out huskily. “That’s all that matters to me. Do you care?”

“Please! *Please*——”

“Anita, do you care?”

“But don’t you see how hard you are making it? We could have gone on pretending, at least, to be friends. We *are* friends. Now it’s all over, and you can’t come here any more. You’ll have to go away, and we can’t ever see each other again. No, no, Dick! You can’t, you mustn’t! I—I——”

Yes, she was right! Yes, he would go away! Yes, he knew that he could never see her again—not this way. But since it was the last time—— And she cared—— Anita!

Pan, who must unquestionably have seen lovers kiss before, looked on from his post, it may be supposed, without much interest. Yet the desperate words of parting and renunciation he heard might have moved him to a broader smile

than ever had his stone countenance been capable of it. The last time, forsooth!

Perhaps on that very day, as on many days before and after it, Mrs. Meryon, driving out to the North Hill, found her husband as usual in the club lounge or on the verandah, smoking with other men; or maybe she spied him from a distance coming striding across the links, carrying his clubs himself, for it appeared that he often dismissed his caddies in disgust, though paying the lads well presumably, since they all liked to caddy for him. Anyone inquiring into this phenomenon would probably have been told that that Meryon guy was all right; he'd generally be pretty good going out, but his luck always seemed to break at the turn, and then he'd lay right down! That was when *you* got fired—but he was all right just the same, they would observe leniently, with the money for the whole round, out and in, comfortably stowed in their pockets. The pack of freckled, snub-featured little wretches knew more about her husband than Cecilia did, but fortunately they did not care. She noticed that sometimes he would be a little gay, a little excited, unnaturally talkative, making jokes of which she could not see the point, telling stories

which did not interest her. Or again he would sit in his habitual silence, while she told *her* jokes and *her* stories, only throwing in a monosyllable now and then, rather, it must be confessed, at random. But Cecilia found this last attitude, on the whole, more satisfactory; he seemed so much more like himself! That was the way he always was at home, quiet but very *deep*, she would have explained; when they were first married, she had wanted to discuss business with him and help him; she thought it was a wife's duty to help her husband in his business. But she soon saw that a much better way of helping was to entertain and distract him. That was one reason she encouraged him to play golf, although she personally could see nothing in the game; but he liked it and it kept his mind off of the office for a while, anyhow. Then in the evenings she chatted to him about all the little events of the day, or whatever was going on at the Women's Club—often it would be something screamingly funny, you know—so that he was never left to himself a minute to brood or worry or get bored. As to that North Hill crowd that he was with playing golf, of course she knew that they drank and gambled and everything else, but that never disturbed her

a particle, Cecilia declared proudly; *some* women would worry and would have good reason to, but *she* wasn't afraid for *her* husband! Nor for her brother, either, she sometimes remembered to add.

For Mr. John Applegate, exactly how nobody knew, least of all himself, during these last months, had become more or less affiliated with the butterflies! It was the more remarkable because John was no butterfly and had no aspirations that way. He was, on the contrary, a hard-headed bachelor of forty-odd who up to this date had had no time or incentive to do anything but make a living, an undertaking in which he had been tolerably successful. But, beginning with the Ledyard Lees, people now discovered him; he knew almost all the men already, and the women found him presentable and amusing. He had some money, some brains, an inexhaustible supply of good-humor; he could play auction, he knew or very quickly learned how to dress, he was unencumbered with a wife—what more would you have? One saw him Everywhere nowadays, in Everybody's box at the theatre, at Everybody's dinner; he belonged to all the clubs, and had been obliged—nothing loath—to buy himself a speedy

little roadster to facilitate his social activities. He took the elevation—if it was an elevation—coolly enough; that hard head was not likely to be turned at its present age, and John was entertained and interested and always quite “on,” as he himself would have said. On the other hand, Cecilia, strange to say, did not resent or deplore his accession to the ranks of butterflydom, as might have been expected; she was, if anything, pleased!

“Oh, John! He’s gotten to be such a *society* man I hardly ever see him!” she complained with humorous importance to her circle. “He’s always running around somewhere; they simply won’t let him alone. That society crowd don’t think anything of running after a man, you know. But if you want to hear all the ins and outs of their latest scandal, come to *me*! I can get it all from John, as much as he can tell any woman, that is, even his own sister,” Cecilia informed her audience with significance. “There’s a good deal that I know from his manner simply can’t be told—about Donelson Meigs, and all that crowd, young girls and all. But John simply knows *everybody*. Oh, I don’t worry. He’s old enough to take care of himself, and I must say it’s rich to hear him tell some of the things.”

As a matter of fact, however, John had disappointingly little to tell; perhaps his standards had suffered deterioration, perhaps he was not naturally so quick to detect evil as his sister, but most of the time he obtusely denied or contradicted the high-flavored stories she brought him for confirmation, and once in a while he took her rather sharply to task for believing and helping to circulate them.

"I can't make out what's the matter with you, Cecie," he said with brotherly candor. "What makes you so down on the North Hill people and all their kind? Why can't you live and let live? They're folks just like anybody else—just like you and me."

"You and *me*? Well, I hope *not*, John Applegate! And I don't know why you say I'm down on them. I'm not down on them at all. It's just that everybody knows about them and the way they go on. Of course, you're a *man*, and it doesn't make any difference to you where you go, or who you know—*whom* you know, I mean. But that rich, fast crowd, the women going with their dresses cut down all but naked, and swilling cocktails and smoking cigarettes and swearing and telling dirty stories——"

“Hold on, hold on! Who told you they did all that?” her brother interrupted rudely. “Nobody, I’ll bet! You’ve just made up your mind that that’s how they are. And let me tell you, Cecie, if it comes to dirty stories, *that’s* a pretty dirty one to tell when you don’t know whether it’s true or not. Of course, you can’t go anywhere without running across some fools; but I shouldn’t wonder if there weren’t just as many, only perhaps a different kind, among your own friends as anywhere else. You can’t get away from fools and they *will* do fool things, but they aren’t any worse one place than another. You and your crowd are dead certain you’re the salt of the earth, and maybe you are—but nobody’s got a monopoly on it, don’t forget *that!* What gets me,” said John meditatively, corrugating his brows, “is just this: you never let a chance get by you to slam the North Hill. You can’t open your head about ’em without slamming ’em, I’ve noticed it time and again——”

Cecilia flashed out at him in righteous indignation. “John, I *don’t!* I *never* do! I don’t see how you can say that. You don’t expect me to *approve* of the way they act, and if I don’t approve I’m going to say so. I’m not going to

kow-tow to them and pretend I think it's all right."

Mr. Applegate proceeded inflexibly. "You slam them right along. And what I was going to say *gets* me is that they never slam *you*! They slam each other a lot, but they never say a word about *your* crowd!"

"Oh, they don't, don't they? Very considerate of them, I'm sure!" said Cecie in severe sarcasm. "There isn't anything they can say, so they're kind enough not to say anything. How thankful I ought to be!" The mood did not sit well on her; her pretty face, always so beamingly contented, clouded sulkily. One would have inferred, if it had not been too monstrous, that the indifference of the butterflies irritated her more than uncomplimentary notice from them!

"Yes, it strikes me continually," John pursued unmoved. "Looks as if they didn't know all of you were on the earth, and anyway, didn't care! And *that*, I guess, is just what's the matter!" he concluded, to his own satisfaction, at any rate, however that obscure remark may be interpreted. For thereafter he sat silent under Cecilia's heated disclaimers of the least interest in the North Hill,

letting her have the last word with the most exasperating imperturbability.

Mr. Applegate frequented the Lees, naturally, with the rest of the world; they had a good cook and a good cellar. Besides, he admired Mrs. Lee, whom he considered a bright woman, and he really liked Ledyard; almost everybody liked Ledyard Lee. But not having as yet taken up the game of golf, although urged to on all sides and constantly stating an intention to, John never happened to fall in with his brother-in-law at the house by the ninth tee; and had there been any gossip going the rounds he would have been, of course, the last person in the world to hear it. Not everybody, however, knew of his connection with the Meryon family; indeed, Mr. Donelson Meigs reported in safe quarters that he himself had made a narrow escape of it one day when Applegate was present, but somebody kicked his shins under the table in the nick of time, and he was quick-witted enough to take the hint and break off, winding up his speech in some other way, though not understanding the whys and wherefores of this necessity for caution. Seeking explanations later, he was surprised to learn that Applegate was Mrs. Meryon's brother, and

expressed suitable gratitude to the shin-kicker; Donelson was humane according to his lights. Yet what he was going to say had been harmless enough; it was merely that he had by accident, of course, run into Dick Meryon taking tea with Mrs. Lee; and Don said that if you were to ask where Ledyard was, it was fair to suppose that he was playing solitaire with Mrs. Meryon! That would be poetic justice, wouldn't it, Mr. Meigs asked ingenuously; and people looked at one another with knowing smiles.

VI

SUMMER came on with the devastating heat about which Mrs. Stevens found that she had all but forgotten. Was it possible that in the old days it had made such a difference in one's wardrobe and the laundry-bills, she wondered, surveying the mounting heaps of white blouses and underwear with dismay. Their Saint Louis was becoming unbearably cramped and stuffy; the question of ice was continually on her mind; it seemed to her in a panic that their none too ample resources were being taxed over the limit by the effort to be merely comfortable. But at this point, Judith, recovering composure, would begin to smile. What she had already grown accustomed to considering mere comfort would be luxury by Old World standards; the economies of living over there could be achieved on this side, too, any moment that she chose, for they consisted mainly in going without! But it seemed as if something in the American atmosphere—figuratively always and sometimes literally—made it impossible to go

without; cleanliness, ease and convenience had passed into the structure of our existence and become an integral part of us. But what was the reason that in dedicating so much effort to making life comfortable, we never seemed to have given a thought to making it sightly? From her window, looking up and down the little suburban street, she could see house after house, yard after yard, not definitely ugly perhaps, yet of unrelieved tastelessness. The mansard roofs and high basements of the Victorian years graduated down to latter-day bungalows, squat, with heavy eaves and deformed porch pillars, in obedience to architectural ideals incredibly perverse. Scarcely even did they suggest homes, for nobody lived in one of them long enough to invest it with a character; and of itself it had no character. A fanciful person might have perceived in them a symbolic expression of the most conquering force in the universe, the force of mediocrity. But these depressing exhibitions of national indifference to or ignorance of the beautiful and fitting had, at least, the quality of the defect; they were sublimely practical. Not one of those unspeakable bungalows but had running water; they had furnaces; they had endless electric and mechanical

appliances for lightening the day's burdens of physical labor; and they had all this as naturally, unconsciously and unboastfully as Europe had its dower of antique loveliness. Mrs. Stevens used to ponder this everyday miracle, asking herself if it did not set off, in a measure, the poetry and charm of the older civilization. She recalled her sojourns of a season, sometimes a year or two in ancient towns of narrow, turning streets and huddled gables, theatrically picturesque. Fragmentary pictures presented themselves before her of chateaux, high-roofed, built of smooth, cream-colored stone blocks with coigns of red brick; of old gardens and laurel walks at once romantic and intimate; of old paved courtyards shut behind tall walls ridged with tiles. There was that place in southwest France, in the wine-growing country; the hills all around were russet with vineyards in the autumn, and the Loire wound among them in broad, shining loops. She and Natalie, who was thirteen then—or was it fourteen?—lived at Number Four, Rue des Chanoines, between the Mairie and the church of Saint Pierre. All day long the bells would be chiming out the hours from the tower hard by; she could close her eyes and still see one of its

chimera-headed gargoyles stark against the sky, framed in a pane of her bedroom casements. In the mornings when she pushed them open, leaning over the guarding bar of iron fretwork, there was always the pastrycook's boy next door, in a long blue smock, sweeping his section of the gutter and cobbles with a broom of twigs, and anon pausing to play with the establishment's dog. Natalie would be scurrying off to her lesson, or scurrying home again down the middle of the sidewalkless street with her violin-case under her arm; they would have tea in their little room with the ornate gilt mantel-mirror and clock that preside over all *pension* rooms; they would crowd together by the inadequate grate with the handful of kindlinglike billets of wood or maybe *boulets* whereof most of the heat went up the chimney. She smiled again to remember the stone floors, glacial to her slippers of a morning, the ever-necessary shawls, Marie or Odette ministering to her bath with a pitcher of hot water—ah, well, there was something to be said for bungalows and steam-heat, after all! The strange thing was that neither civilization would adopt the really admirable features of the other.

At any rate, there could be no question of their

returning to that earlier environment, she decided. She was getting too old to live away from her country, and Natalie, in less than a year, had become so thoroughly repatriated that even for the sake of her music it was doubtful if she could ever again look with the same obedient acquiescence upon Florence, Brussels, Munich, Tours, any one of those old abiding places of theirs, as home. She was by this time "all for the U. S.," as she would sometimes say in accents from which the alien inflection had completely worn off; nowadays, instead of adjurations to speak English, her mother was more likely to be uttering warnings not to forget her other languages. Although still puzzled by some of its manifestations, Natalie was frankly happy in the American life, as lived by American youth, so free, so restless, so impregnable to worry, or the sense of responsibility. Her recollections of the other existence were not nearly so influenced by its æsthetically satisfactory aspects as her mother's; to Natalie the backgrounds and surroundings of the Old World were more or less distastefully associated with problems of ways and means, forever present, forever under discussion in every household. The girl, who as a youngster had many a time

gone to market, to the butcher, the dressmaker, the hardware-shop, skipping along by the side of the *bonne* or *fräulein* of the moment, could not remember ever having seen a single article bought or sold without the protracted and hard-fought bout of bargaining which both sides regarded as a sacred duty. She looked back upon those scenes now with shrinking, though in truth they were more pathetic than ignoble. All Natalie saw was that here, contrariwise, however much people, old and young, talked about money, they actually never thought about it at all. There was so much of it; it came so easily, it went so easily; everybody seemed to have everything he wanted, nobody haggled over the price of anything. The carelessness and lavishness colored every phase of national life; everybody was overpaid and, in his turn, was overpaying. Everybody gave munificently, and did not scruple to ask. When a "drive" for the local Red Cross was instituted, and Natalie, with the rest of the girls, was assigned a district wherein to beg, she found the task a sinecure; anybody could collect money for any ostensible purpose, and to make stipulations as to its use or demand an accounting would be looked upon with active disfavor. Spending was

a means of entertainment, frequently *the* means of entertainment! It was not surprising that the girl should have found this spacious atmosphere more to her liking than that of self-denial, frugality and caution in which she had been brought up. Nevertheless, the early tutoring wielded a certain restraint over her; she was not often extravagant. Perhaps the fact that she had two or three times earned a little with her violin strengthened her self-control; she knew what grueling study, what hours of disappointment and despondency, what final torturing effort and concentration went to the making of those dollars!

"It must be perfectly lovely for you to be able just to pick up your violin and play anything whenever you feel like it!" Marjorie Applegate said, in honest and generous admiration. "But that's what it is to have a talent, I suppose."

Natalie looked at her helplessly, a little resentful, yet resigned; even her brief experience had sufficed to demonstrate the futility of combating certain popular illusions about the artistic life, yet she could not refrain from one more attempt. "Herr Silbermarck used to say: 'Dalendt! Dere iss no dalendt! Dere iss noding but hardt vork!'"

she said, mimicking the old German music-teacher with notable fidelity and spirit. "At home I never play to amuse myself. I've got to practice."

"Well, it isn't like the ordinary grind. I've often thought I'd rather have a musical talent than any other. You get results so much sooner," said Marjorie, undisturbed. "It's funny there isn't very much in the club. We've hardly got any musical members. Of course, lots of them used to be a little—enough to play accompaniments or rag-time for dancing, you know. But they all give it up the minute they get married. That's one reason it's so hard to get up these Saturday afternoon things; they're so few that can do anything—really good stunts, I mean, like your playing. And people get tired of little one-act plays and members reading their own poems—generally free verse at that—and papers about all kinds of subjects. It was awfully kind of you to come and play, Natalie," she went on gratefully. "It made the whole thing go off so much better, and being chairman I would have hated to have it a flop. All the chairmen want their particular afternoon to be *good*, of course, and you're supposed to think up something new every time. It's

not so easy," she wound up, shaking her head soberly.

This conversation was taking place after one of her College Club meetings in the Louis XV salon of the Hotel Preston, which was rented for the occasion every other Saturday afternoon. The club was not as yet strong enough to own its own hearth and roof-tree, although it collectively looked forward to that end, and plans had been proposed for raising the money by subscriptions from the *alumnæ*, by assessments on the other clubs belonging to their Federation, or by one of the ever popular "drives." All the devices were supported with the conscienceless enthusiasm peculiar to American organizations; and they all had an equal chance of success with the astonishingly ready American pocket, as Natalie knew. This time it had not been opened for her benefit, however; she had played with good will enough merely on the other girl's request. And if it piqued her artist's vanity to find her playing regarded as a matter of course, or more patronizingly than appreciatively, she was still enough of a woman of the world not to show it. When they smilingly commiserated her upon not having had the good fortune to be a student and graduate of

any college which would have entitled her to admission to their ranks, Natalie expressed an appropriate regret, but at heart the dreadful young female Machiavelli was not in the least distressed by her exclusion. A good many of the members were much older than herself, and of those who were her own age, like Marjorie, she saw very little. She was not ill at ease in their society, for between Natalie's mother and her cosmopolitan experience she was too well equipped to be ill at ease in any company, but she did not quite know what to make of them, and could not find many interests in common with them. The fault was not theirs, obviously, for they were interested in everything! They talked scandal, religions, clothes, husbands, psychiatry, cooks, auction-bridge, babies, and methods of reducing superfluous flesh with an astounding facility and vivacity; they were all fanatically busy, dashing from one activity to the next without pause or rest; it was no wonder that Natalie's secluded hours of violin study seemed in contrast like the pastime of leisure. They remembered their several colleges with affectionate delight, not as institutions of learning, but as places where they had had a superlatively "good time." To Natalie,

brought up according to the literal European interpretation of educational aims, it occurred to wonder what would happen if the Paris Conservatory should be so conducted as to insure its pupils a "good time"? Or fancy old Herr Silbermarck making classes pleasant! She had learned not to divulge these views, or to make comments and comparisons, for people listened only to deride. It never entered any one's head to discuss the differences with her; ways, ideals and standards not in accord with their own were to them infamously funny when they were not more or less contemptible, but in either case not worthy of discussion. After a few disconcerting experiences, Miss Stevens, who, as has been hinted, was not gifted with the most angelic disposition in the world, took warning; so that now, in answer to Marjorie's exposition of the difficulties besetting a chairman of entertainment for Saturday afternoons, all she said was that playing accompaniments was a profession; she had known people who worked at nothing else.

"Oh, of course, people can make a profession of it; they say they get very high pay, too. You can make a profession of anything if you just

want to *dig*. But in a club like this you wouldn't expect that kind; you just want somebody that can play a little," said Marjorie immovably; and Natalie was silenced. She meditated, mechanically moving her fingers over the worn surface of the violin-case laid across her knees, as she sat on the edge of the little dais in the Louis XV salon, with her feet swinging. Whether Natalie was a genuine artist or not, she shared in some measure the artist's respect for the thing he does, his harrowing conscientiousness, his impossible mingling of arrogance and humility; and all her instincts, trained and native, rebelled against this creed unconsciously preached and practiced everywhere that half done is well enough done, this satisfaction with short cuts, easy ways and cheap successes, this slip-shod humanity that so readily tolerated the second-rate. She had been studying music since she was five years old; a procession of teachers filed across the background of her memories. Herr Silbermark in the Munich school, Edouard Andrés, Madame Leczinska, that queer, flaming Polish genius who was credibly reported to have laid a dog-whip about the shoulders of a pupil who persisted in taking an up-bow instead of down—was there one of them who would have

listened half a second to any instrument played "a little"? Was there a soul in their audiences who would have listened? Yet there were not lacking real musicians here; Natalie herself had been invited to play with a local quartette—of which, to be sure, every member was foreign born!—and they had given a little concert of chamber music which had been sufficiently patronized.

"I should think you'd hate to have your fingernails stubbed off that way all the time," Marjorie observed, eyeing the other's hands with a sort of idle interest. "But of course there's always *something*," she added philosophically.

"I never thought about them," said Natalie, startled, looking down at her hands; they were small, thin and flexible, but they were not pretty hands. Marjorie's were both pretty and well kept. She had not meant to institute any unkind comparisons, however; she had merely, as usual, said exactly what she thought, and now went on with the next thought in her head, which exhibited a certain relation to the foregoing:

"It's funny the way people make up their minds what they're going to do, have you noticed? What did you think of besides music?"

Natalie reflected. "I don't believe I ever thought of anything else," she said at last. "Maybe it was mother that decided in the beginning. Anyway, it always seemed to be taken for granted when I was little, and afterwards, of course——" Her gesture—she still had little foreign tricks of movement with her face and hands—completed the explanation.

"Isn't that funny? I've thought of dozens of things. I was crazy to be a trained nurse when I was about fifteen. When you're that kid age, you're apt to get all kinds of crazes, you know. But it sort of petered out, somehow," said Marjorie, with a laugh. "Then, when I went to college, I had my mind all made up for a while to teach, or maybe do some kind of library work, but I gave that up. I didn't seem exactly suited to it, and positions like that don't pay enough, anyhow."

"That was when you decided on social service? When do you begin?" Natalie asked, with pardonable curiosity. It was evident that none of the vocations catalogued required a course of study commencing at the age of five as had her own; but what they did require, and just what were their nature and attraction, were questions

that intrigued her. The other, however, only answered with a shrug, swinging her feet, too.

"Oh, I don't know. I've weakened on that uplift stuff. If Mrs. Kemble had stayed"—she was naming the erstwhile head of the social service bureau—"if *she* had stayed I might have got into it. I was awfully interested in her. But they moved her to Kansas City, you know, and I—oh, well, Kansas City doesn't appeal to me, somehow. I wouldn't care to go out there. And I'm not a bit crazy about the man they've got in charge here now; I wouldn't work with *him*. So you see how it is. I'd rather get a secretarial job, or one in an office—where they didn't need a stenographer, of course. It's an awful job learning shorthand; I wouldn't undertake *that*. There're loads of girl stenographers, anyhow. I'd rather be just general office girl. I know a girl that gets twenty-one hundred a year in a broker's office, and she doesn't have to do anything—hardly *anything!*"

Natalie exclaimed in wonder and admiration: "*Twenty-one hundred!*" Then her face fell. How long would it be before she could make that much fiddling, or giving lessons? "Well, of

course, being a college graduate——” she said resignedly. “If I——”

“This girl isn’t. She only went through high school. But she heard of this job, and she just walked right in and took it, and she’s been there ever since,” said Marjorie. “I’m sure I could, too.”

Natalie stared at her a perplexed moment. “Why, I thought you said *nobody* could get anything to do that wasn’t a college graduate!” she said helplessly. “Didn’t you?”

“Oh, yes. But this girl isn’t,” said Marjorie, not in the least concerned about her previous statements. “I just know I could do the same kind of work. I’d like to try it, anyhow, just to see if I couldn’t.” And while Natalie was bemusedly pondering this information, some of which seemed quite irreconcilable with the spirit and in fact the letter of earlier information from Marjorie, the latter glanced at the watch clasped to her nicely rounded wrist and ceased swinging her feet, jumping down. “The boys ought to be here. I think we’d better go down.”

She meant young Harkness and a friend of his, Randon MacQuair. Randon was no millionaire’s son; but he and the other had been friends since

the days they were at Harvard together, and volunteered with the troops when the country went into the war. The name was well known locally, and people liked to meet that fine old gentlewoman, the young fellow's grandmother, Mrs. Hector MacQuair, who at seventy-five or eighty was still sprightly, still an eminently perfect specimen of the everybodies of her generation. She and Marjorie's aunt had been introduced to each other at one of the gatherings in the interest of devastated France, and Cecilia was charmed with the older woman. "So sweet, so bright, so *cultured*, and with it all so *plain*!" she went about declaring enthusiastically. "The MacQuairs are one of the oldest families here, too, but you'd never know it from *her*. She might be—why, she might be *anybody*!" Mrs. MacQuair, on her side, remarked mildly, so that was the young woman Dick Meryon married! The two men were coming in Jack's car to pick up and take them to a picnic dance, beefsteak supper or what-not at the Warren, which was a popular resort for this species of informal and frequently impromptu entertainment. It was only Jack who was a member of the little circle that had the privilege of admittance to the place; Randy could barely af-

ford the University Club. There they were, sure enough, when Marjorie and the other went downstairs; and they all piled into the car, which was not built to hold so many, and went spinning out to the North Hill in a carelessness of array which would undoubtedly have given that Victorian survival, Randon's grandmother, a shocked moment. Natalie had on the short-sleeved frock of white and buff checked gingham, and the drooping black straw hat wreathed with daisies and corn-flowers, which she had assumed to be sufficiently elaborate to appear in before the College Club on a summer afternoon; Marjorie was in a white skirt and orange-colored sweater with boyish-looking round white collar and cuffs. They were gloveless, they were corsetless; and they were both brisk, clean, wholesome, companionable, attractive, almost without a hint of sex. The mind staggers to contemplate them, and picture what they would have been in 1880; yet it is to be questioned if even that well-stayed and thoroughly clad period produced much better results in the way of young women.

They went out, cutting across by Bradford Lane that skirted the west end of the Hills links. It was growing late, the sun was setting; only a

player here and there might be seen determinedly finishing his round, and everywhere the caddies were straying homeward in skylarking groups. The ninth green and its vicinity were deserted, but as they came in sight a tall man was coming rather hastily down the little flight of stepping-stones sunk in the turf that led invitingly up the slight rise masked with shrubbery marking the boundary line between the golf club's grounds and the next property. He struck off across the links, walking fast, with his head down, but Marjorie cried out in surprised and pleased recognition:

"Why, there's Uncle Dick! Isn't it? Yes, *it is!*"

"Oh, you can't tell, it's too dark," said Jack, at the wheel, without turning his head. He could not, of course; Jack was a careful driver, and just now his whole attention was fixed apparently on avoiding a collision with a nursemaid and perambulator crossing Bradford Lane about two squares ahead.

"Yes *it is!* He must have been playing, he's just taken up golf, you know, and he's simply crazy about it. Stop, do! Let's hoo-hoo to him, and ask what he went round in!"

"Oh, no use, I guess. We can't give him a lift,

we're going just the other way," said young MacQuair, and by that time, indeed, they had got too far past, Jack suddenly putting on speed in spite of the nursemaid. Natalie had said nothing.

That, as it happened, was the last meeting of Marjorie's club for the season; all the other clubs, too, were holding their final sessions, and the members making ready for a summer out of the Ohio Valley heat. Cecilia decided on one of the Michigan beaches this year, and was happily busy planning and getting together her wardrobe. She hated to leave Dick, but he insisted, she said, and after all, Ne-Ah-Ton-Sing was not far, only twelve hours, and he expected to run up once a month, anyhow, for a week-end. In the meanwhile he was going to live at the North Hill Country Club, where they had *perfectly luxurious* apartments for men, so her mind was at ease about him. She never *could* understand, Cecilia would add in warm disapprobation, how any woman could go off and leave her husband all alone in the house to look out for himself and work making money for her in some hot old office while she was having a nice, easy time at a pleasure resort, hundreds of miles away. Suppose he got sick in the night, with nobody to care

for him, *then* how would she feel? She, for one, Cecilia said, would never forgive herself; she wouldn't have a quiet moment or enjoy herself one bit if she didn't know that Dick was all right; she believed in a wife making a *home* for her husband!

She left the first of July; everybody left, and the North Hill began to look forsaken, although some people, like the Ledyard Lees, for instance, held on heroically till August, averring that home with the thermometer at ninety was more comfortable than the average cramped quarters in the average summer hotel with the thermometer quite likely to go to ninety any day, notwithstanding the stock talk about sleeping under blankets. Dick got numbers of colored postcards from Mrs. Dick with views entitled, "*Chieftain Bay*," "*The Cliff House*," "*Ne-Ah-Ton-Sing: a path through the pines*"; on the reverse there were crowded messages of which the burden was that she was having a lovely time; that these cards were so convenient for just a word like this every day; that everybody was taking lessons in mah-jongh and it was *perfectly fascinating*; that she wished he was there; and that, with loads of love, she was C. Mrs. Stevens got some in like vein; she

was one of the stay-at-homes perforce. Natalie, however, was invited to go camping in the Yellowstone with the Macreadys and some others—camping *de luxe* with guides, saddle horses, a pack train and endless accessories. Mr. Harkness was of the party; his leave of absence expired in the fall. Perhaps Judith still entertained some shame-faced expectations.

VII

THE Women's Club, of which Mrs. Richard Meryon was an ex-president, after the comparative idleness of the summer, resumed activities about the first week of October with business meetings and a fevered energy centered on programs for the coming year. Everybody had got home; the Classic Circle, the Travel Circle, the Musical and Dramatic Circles presented their plans, or, in the more favored phrase, outlined their courses of study. Cecilia, who was in charge of the Literary Department, spent many delightedly laborious and anxious hours; she felt her responsibilities with a certain relish in the burden. It gave her an innocent pleasure to be overworked, to sit down before a desk heaped with correspondence, newspaper notices, and communications from entertainment bureaus and "lyceums," to be called to the telephone twenty times an hour and render decisions with fatigued but businesslike brevity. The automobile was busier than ever; the cook had more evenings out;

there were interviews; it was actually quite like war times, she confided to Mrs. Stevens with happy and excited importance.

"I have everything settled now, up to March, that is, and all the programs are always more or less upset by that time, anyhow. Postponements, and people changing their dates, or not being able to come at all, and things like that," she said. "But such a job! However, I always want to do everything I can for the club as a matter of *principle*. You have no business to join a club unless you are willing to work for it, don't you think so?"

Mrs. Stevens was obliged to confess that she never had joined one. "One doesn't over there. They don't have women's clubs, only men's. And it seems as if the men didn't think that way about theirs. They seem to think a club is a place where nobody works at all!"

"Oh, *men*! Their clubs are mere social organizations, you know," Cecilia explained to her carefully. "They aren't intended for self-improvement and *culture*."

"Ah, yes, to be sure!"

"We study everything in ours. This year we are having a course in parliamentary law that

is the most helpful, illuminating thing you can imagine. It's under Mrs. Bangs; she leads the discussions, that is. I'm sure you'd enjoy her, Cousin Judith, she's such a brilliant woman. Her grasp of—er—things, you know, is perfectly masculine. And with it all she has such a keen sense of humor—that *quiet* kind, you know."

"Like Mrs. Gumble?" queried Judith artlessly. "You're going to have her again this year, aren't you?" She was about to fabricate some excuse at once pleasant and plausible whereby to escape another encounter with the celebrity when she perceived that it was needless. Cecilia had all but forgotten Mrs. Gumble, as her expression, at first vague, then indifferent and faintly superior, indicated. Where are the roses of yesteryear?

"Mrs. Gumble? Oh, *no!* Nobody has those Current Events things any more—*nobody!* Really, she didn't do anything but give us a re-hash of what was in the *World's Opinion* and the *Literary World* and all those other weeklies, you know. Of course, she put in a little of her own, but nothing out of the way; this year we decided we could do our own reading up just as well. The subscriptions were ten dollars for the course, and we felt that was rather too much, considering

what we were getting. Personally, I'd rather put the money into something really worth while, like getting Archibald Flink here for this lecture. Of course, he asks a good deal, but he's such a great man one has to expect *that*," said Cecilia reasonably. "You read his last book, '*Darkest Before Dawn*,' of course."

"Why, no—not yet," Mrs. Stevens acknowledged guiltily. "It's hard to keep up with *all* the novels, you know——"

Cecelia looked concerned. "Well, I don't know—I don't see exactly what you will do when you meet him this afternoon, Cousin Judith. I should have thought when you knew he was coming you'd have made an effort, anyhow. You didn't need to *read* it, you know, just glance through, enough to get the general drift and talk about it intelligently. He's so English, though, maybe he won't care. They expect to run into all kinds of people over here, and they never seem to be surprised at anything. At any rate, we've got an awfully good crowd for him, every seat sold! *That* ought to please him. And *men* coming, too!"

"Oh, will Dick——"

Cecilia's charming face was overcast for an instant. "No. I told him it was Archibald Flink

and that he was considered the foremost English novelist of the day, and he was over here touring the country with these lectures; but Dick just said: 'My God, *another?*' Of course he was only in fun, Cousin Judith," she explained again hastily, with a troubled look. "Only I do wish he *wouldn't*! It's so crude—that is, it *sounds* crude. Dick himself really *isn't*, you know. But I *wish* he wouldn't; I've often begged him not to. With me, it doesn't make any difference, because I understand, but outsiders might get such a wrong impression. Oh, well!" Cecilia sighed resignedly. "He couldn't have come to-day, anyhow, as it's turned out, so it's just as well. He had to go east on business."

She broke off to give her attention to steering in and out among other arriving and departing automobiles as they neared the club house entrance. They went up the handsome flight of steps and into the hall, where were already gathered numbers of other Cecílias, as it seemed to Mrs. Stevens, looking around upon the alert, enthusiastic, good-looking, well-dressed women. In her quality of guest she had come prepared to admire everything undoubtedly with some mental reservations, but now suddenly found herself, not

without surprise, admiring warmly and thoroughly. She felt older than the generation represented here, if not in actual years, still in ideas, and her experience helped further to alienate her. There had been no such things as women's clubs in Judith's day, and her Victorian mind stood in awe before this feminine achievement. The big, imposing structure had cost thousands of dollars raised by methods which assumed for her the dire and terrifying obscurity of all "business." Loans, mortgages, issues of stock had something to do with it, she knew, but without in the least understanding. They had committees, audited accounts, paid salaries and taxes! Judith, whose excursions into the arena of affairs were limited to worried little entries in a ledger of daily expenditures, and to the periodical struggle with her bank book and cancelled checks, envisaged this fearless assumption and discharge of financial responsibility with a very sober respect. Everybody seemed to know everybody else well; there was a great deal of dashing about with exclamations and greetings and high, nervous laughter, but she herself went unrecognized and unrecognized. It was natural, at her age, she reflected, standing aside; the city had grown and society

enlarged unbelievably, to say nothing of the changes in its interests and habits. Cecilia brought up several members for introduction, then she, too, dashed off.

"Mrs. Meryon's always so busy, and to-day it's worse than ever because she's on the reception committee for Mr. Flink, of course. She has to take him up on the platform and introduce him; wouldn't you think she'd *die*? I'd be too frightened to breathe, let alone make a speech. But she's so brilliant, she doesn't mind; they always get one of the brilliant ones to do things like that," one lady volunteered; and she added, smiling, "Mrs. Meryon said I was to take you under my wing and find good seats somewhere. I didn't catch the name, though——"

"Stevens," said Judith, who had not caught the others.

"Mrs. Stevens? Is this your first visit here? Oh, pardon me, I see somebody I've simply *got* to speak to." *She* dashed off! However, Mrs. Stevens almost immediately found herself being addressed in a nasally distinct voice by another of the admirably gowned, gloved, hatted concourse with a face and manner as sweet, trustful and satisfied as Cecilia's own.

"It's so hard for a stranger, isn't it, meeting so many people at once?" said this one sympathetically. "You've come here to live, haven't you? I thought Mrs. Meryon said——"

"Yes. But I'm not an entire stranger. I used to live here years ago."

"Oh, *did* you? I wonder if you're any relation to Reverend Stevens, the one that used to have the Eleventh Baptist Church on Winter Street. Our families were well acquainted. Then they moved to Mookersville, Indiana, and we kind of got out of touch the way people do, but the congregation thought a lot of Reverend Stevens while he was here. Uriah J. Stevens, he was a very powerful leader in prayer, with a hare-lip—well, not a real bad one, just a kind of tendency, you might say. Are you——"

"I'm afraid not," said Judith regretfully, feeling somehow as if she were losing ground by this admission; but the other went on with scarcely a pause:

"Well, I thought you might be." She smiled reminiscently. "I often think I never *shall* forget the time Reverend came to call on us, when he was just new here, and was going round getting acquainted with the congregation, you know. After

he'd been calling a while, grandma asked if he wouldn't make a prayer, so he did, of course. And just when we were all kneeling down and he was praying, here our old cat walked in and commenced jumping on our backs, one to the next, like he had a trick of doing—he was a regular pet and a privileged character, you know—and we were all in fear and trembling he'd jump on Reverend's, but there wasn't a thing to do, we just had to keep on kneeling, and finally he sat down and went to washing his face, and then we knew there wasn't any danger. But I was just a young girl, and I suppose it struck my funny-bone, because I remember to this day what a time I had to keep from laughing right out in the middle of Reverend praying. The family all say I always do see the funny side of everything, anyhow, and they expect me to laugh at my own funeral! You aren't any relation, you say? Well, I thought possibly you might be, though Stevens isn't an uncommon name."

Mrs. Stevens, not feeling adequate to comment acceptably on this anecdote or match it with one in kind, had recourse to that amiable and inviting attitude of the listener whereof she was past mistress; and there now dashed up and dashed

off a succession of club members, all of whom, it appeared, were occupied with various forms of literary endeavor so that they took even more than the normal interest in the occasion. Mrs. Lillian Byrd, who wrote free verse; Mrs. Ida Slutton McGee, who was "making a study of pagantry and had had several produced," some one breathed impressively in the guest's ear; Miss Mathilde Milton Madigan, the journalist; Miss Niobe Schlacht, who "had had a story published in the New England Monthly," Mrs. Stevens heard from the same source—all these she met. And then it was time to go into the auditorium, and presently the great man was being introduced—but not by Cecilia! Mrs. Whitby Brodhead, the president, officiated. Mrs. Meryon only appeared, honorably enough to be sure, with the group of ex-presidents, but Mrs. Stevens divined that this arrangement had not been arrived at without risk of what other members diplomatically referred to as *friction*. Cecilia's smile lacked its spontaneous quality; it was too determined.

Mr. Flink, who was a slightly bald, slightly stout, and slightly puzzled-looking gentleman, middle-aged, in eyeglasses and nice English

clothes, "held the audience spell-bound for two hours," according to Miss Madigan in the *Observer* extra that evening. His lecture was entitled: "The Disenchanted, a Review of Some of the Practitioners of Modern Fiction." The practitioners were in a bad way, to judge from many of his periods. . . . "To a stupendous and poignant technique they add the brilliantly colored caricatures of a generation which, though still young, can find no reason for its continued existence, but sits in loneliness on the dust piles of dreams finding no hope but in the one phrase, *Maybe and Maybe Not!*" . . . "Life presents itself to them as the darkly scintillating glow of a motionless moving-picture film, a confusion of cascading rectangles, to the accompaniment of an orchestral instrumentation so insistently strident as to be without sound. . . ." Every one listened in rapt attention, and from the murmurous rustle and the bursts of applause that followed most of the statements, Mrs. Stevens concluded that every one understood and agreed. It should have produced widespread depression, but on the contrary the best possible spirits seemed to prevail as before; everywhere were the same pleased, cheerful, contented faces eagerly awaiting more

melancholy news about those unhappy practitioners!

"It's *Russian*, it's simply, wonderfully *Russian*! Nothing but gloom and degradation! So *true*!" her next neighbor commented ecstatically. "Flink is one of the realists himself, you know. Some people, of course, call it disagreeable, but *I* always say it's *art*. I know it's not pretty, but it's *art*!"

This was amid the scraping of chairs at the end as the audience was rising; and while similar declarations were heard on all sides, everybody as it seemed being particularly anxious to go on record as approving of what was not pretty but *art*, Mrs. Stevens became aware of an undercurrent, as it were, of heated opinion, almost controversy, on an altogether different subject. "Weren't you *surprised*——" "Well, Mrs. Brodhead has always been fond of the spotlight and perfectly determined to *have* it, you know *that*!" "After all, she is the president and her position justified her——" "Still, I think in the circumstances, after the work Mrs. Meryon did to get him here, she had a *right* to expect——" "Of course one can't say anything, but I *should* like Mrs. Meryon to know that I for one was fully

expecting *her* to make the introduction——” “Anyhow, Mrs. Brodhead is a good president, you can’t deny *that*, and if——” “Yes, everybody always gives in to her and that’s essential for a president, but still Mrs. Meryon might have stood firm and *demand*ed——” “She probably thought it more graceful to retire——” “Well, if it comes to *that*, it would have been ever so much *more* graceful for Mrs. Brodhead to have——” Judith again effaced herself or tried to in a corner, shrinking from being witness to these internecine differences. Cecilia, with a little higher color than usual, smiling with steely eyes, was deprecatingly receiving the comment of her circle of adherents; Mrs. Brodhead, on her side, with much the same expression and air, might be guessed to be doing the same thing; the factions were beginning to exchange ladylike hostilities. War was in the air and the doors of the temple of Janus wide open! Mrs. Stevens saw the celebrated novelist entrenching himself behind the grand piano on the platform, but this was not a defensive precaution as directly became apparent; he was getting out his fountain pen. “Come on up, come on up! He’s going to autograph the programs!” some one told her excitedly. “You want yours

autographed, of *course!*" She whisked Mrs. Stevens into the queue that had already formed.

Leaving the club, they took up Mrs. Stedman, Mrs. Patterson and Mrs. Lund, to all of whom Mrs. Stevens was introduced in rapid-fire succession; and now the question of the president's prerogatives as opposed to Cecilia's hardly earned privileges was very thoroughly aired, heedless of Judith's amiably silent presence. She would not have known what to say, but fortunately was not required to say anything. The talk swirled around her, occasionally it fairly seemed to submerge her; she did not attempt to feign an interest which would have seemed to her, in her position as guest, to be in bad taste. But did taste, good or bad, matter to them at all, she speculated, watching them. She might have been a visitor from another planet to whom their manners, their trend of thought, the very language they spoke were foreign and incomprehensible; yet nowhere could be found—what was the phrase?—more representative women! The trouble was with herself, she mused; she and all her kind not only were out of date now, but in their long-past heyday, *they* had never been representative women. They had merely believed themselves to

be members of a caste which no longer existed, and perhaps never had had any business to exist, even in theory. She heard her name spoken and roused herself. "If Mrs. Stevens isn't too tired," some one was saying, and Cecilia was slowing down the motor tentatively with an eye on her.

"Eh? No, indeed, I'm not tired. It's been too entertaining."

"It certainly has been *entertaining!*" said Mrs. Patterson, with prodigious significance glancing at the others.

"Well, never mind, we must not talk about that any more. It will all come up before the board of governors in due time," said Cecilia, in a high manner; and the three partisans looked at her with devout admiration and approval. "Why, I was just saying, Cousin Judith, that after all the *strain* and *tension* on top of everything I've been through already, I'm simply not going to go home and fuss about dinner, and the girls aren't, either. We all thought we could just stop at the Ark cafeteria and get something to eat, and then go to a movie afterwards. I don't know about *you*, of course, but *I* feel as if I *must* have a little rest and quiet. The pictures take your mind off things

so. You don't have to think at all, just sit there and *relax*! If you'd like——”

This program was carried out, Judith demurring at first in fear that she might be a fifth wheel; but the others, perceiving this, were far too kind-hearted to leave her with the idea. They insisted on her company with a genuine earnestness and spirit of fellowship that somehow rebuked her; would she do as much for them? She thought that they were not especially interested in her; it was only the exercise of an impersonal humanity. They wanted her to have a good time; they wanted everybody to have a good time; they were the salt of the earth. And here she sat, inwardly aloof, wondering at them, sometimes, alas, struggling not to laugh at them! Something was wrong with her, she reflected again in humility. They went to the cafeteria which displayed as a sign a little Noah's Ark after the classic pattern; within there were wall-papers figured with nursery representations of elephants and dromedaries, geese and tigers, and the dove with the olive-branch; and in the middle of the room a pool with a crest of rock to which another miniature ark was moored. The ladies variously directed Mrs. Stevens' attention to the

decorations as cute and quaint. The atmosphere was heavily charged with odors of which every one was associated with some edible, yet only two could be identified, coffee and tomato-sauce. There were counters and nickel-plated urns which Mrs. Stevens visited in turn with her four hostesses; they met a good many acquaintances. In a corner a phonograph powerfully reproduced *O sole mio* and *Killarney*, and what with that the by no means subdued conversation and the crashing accompaniment of china and cutlery, she would have judged the chances for quiet and relaxation reduced to the minimum had it not been obvious that whatever those phrases connoted to Cecilia, the latter was actually experiencing. She ate with zest, her face, her whole bearing recaptured the glow of happy and harmless self-satisfaction missing for a while that afternoon.

"Mrs. Meryon tells me you've been living in Europe," said Judith's right-hand neighbor; but whether this was Mrs. Stedman, Mrs. Patterson or Mrs. Lund, she did not know. By this time, all the names and faces of the afternoon were inextricably tangled for her. The representative women were a fixed type and she could not dis-

tinguish one of them from the next. The speaker went on: "How do our clubs compare with theirs?"

"They don't have any," said Judith—and by this statement unintentionally focussed everybody's attention, somewhat to her dismay. "They don't even have any sewing-circles or little reading and travel clubs." She remembered the drab life of the provincial towns she had lived in here and there. "They don't have *anything*, really."

Four pairs of candid and unclouded eyes like Cecilia's rested on her in shocked interrogation. "Why, Mrs. Stevens! What do the women *do*?"

"Oh, they go to market and to church and keep house and look after the children, of course. But it's very dull. In fact, I think the life of the average middle-class woman in France, for instance, is the dullest——" Mrs. Stevens halted. It had just flashed into her mind that Cecilia and her companions did not know what the term "middle-class" meant; they had never thought of themselves or of anybody else as belonging to a class, high, middle, or low! "The average *woman*, I mean," she pieced out rather awkwardly. "Their

lives are terribly dull from our point of view. They don't have the money that every one seems to have over here, you know, and that—that makes a difference, too."

"Well, I should think it did, if that's the way they are!" Mrs. Lund—or was it Mrs. Stedman?—declared with energy. "No clubs! Of course, I knew they were behind us in a great many things, but I thought Europe was *full*, just naturally *full* of centers of culture!"

"They don't seem to think so much about culture as they do about education," said Mrs. Stevens; and reading bewildered inquiry in the faces of her audience, she added: "They're all educated, you know. I think that as a rule they are better educated than we are."

Incredulity fired by indignation exploded around her. Mrs. Stedman—or perhaps Mrs. Patterson—declaimed fiercely. "*Better educated!* And they haven't a single club and just stay at home and don't make the slightest effort to improve themselves! I must say that's a funny way to be better educated. We've got the loveliest schools in the world. Why, it's a known *fact!* Just look at North High! They have a swimming-pool and athletic grounds, and a pipe-organ and

everything. Simply wonderful mural paintings, and they give courses in psychoanalysis, and wood-working and domestic science and *everything*—and that's only *one* school! They're all like that, *all* of them!" She glared at Mrs. Stevens reproachfully while the others added their words of confirmation. The United States had the best, most numerous schools and colleges in the world where pupils were taught the most; professors of pedagogy came from the four corners of the universe to study our methods; our own teachers were invariably the most representative men and women that could be secured; we spent hundreds of thousands of dollars, one was all the time being asked to contribute to keep some educational work going. Better educated, indeed!

It was Cecilia who put an end to the outburst of patriotic eloquence. "Cousin Judith's trouble is she's lived over there so long she's completely out of touch with everything here at home," she said, kindly and forbearingly patting the older lady's hand. "She doesn't mean to be un-American, she just doesn't know. Never mind, after she's been home a little she'll get the right angle. It's so much a matter of our atmosphere, and

that will all come back to you in time, Cousin Judith, of course."

"Of course," Mrs. Stevens echoed mildly. She was aware that it was a plea to the rest to commute her sentence on the ground of extenuating circumstances.

They went to the moving-picture theater where they saw what the title announced to be a throbbing drama of love and destiny under the languorous skies of the tropics. Other titles interlarded, informed such of the audience as did not immediately recognize the locality that the mad social whirl which had caught *Bruce* and *Aline Raymond* in its toils was estranging them more and more. Then *Vincent Dare* came "looming as a real man among the pasteboard dolls of *Aline's* world." Then: "And so the net woven by fate drew closer and closer." And the next thing the audience knew, *Aline* and *Vincent* were most reprehensibly enjoying themselves on an island in the South Pacific, with palms wagging and scantily clad natives riding surf-boards. It was a situation which should have outraged the elevated morals of wives like Cecilia and her friends, to say nothing of respectable people in general, but no one left the theater, or exhibited

other signs of disapproval; no doubt they all restrained themselves on the principle that it was only fair to see it through before delivering judgment. There succeeded some Polynesian dances and sacred rites, the arrival of a missionary, a shipwreck, *Bruce Raymond's* reappearance sadly degraded by drink and vices incident to the mad social whirl, his death—by a misstep into the crater of Mauna Loa—and the final blameless union of *Aline* and *Vincent*, with the volcano in the background. After that, in comic relief, "*Percy and Petty Flatlife* in the suburbs" began, but Cecilia's party would not stay for it; they said those *Percy-and-Petty* pictures were vulgar. But one and all pronounced the first play *poetry*.

"Of course, some people would question whether she ought to have left her husband that way. But I'm very *broad*," Cecilia said. "She didn't love him, and she did love the other man. When a man and woman *belong* to each other that way—— It was much finer and nobler of them to go off together and brave the world's opinion than to keep on living in *married slavery*——"

"Anyhow, they got married in the end, so it was all right," one of the others reminded her;

and another conservative remarked that it seemed as if they might have waited and got a divorce first—"before they went off to that island, you know."

"Yes, but people in love don't do things in that cold-blooded way. You can't sit in judgment on *love*," said Cecilia, at once leniently and positively. "They were *carried away* by it. It's the kind of problem that people have to solve in their own fashion, everybody for themselves. I don't believe in being hard on any one that yields to—*to passion*," she lowered her voice—"because *we* can't tell, you know; *we* don't realize always what a tremendous force it is in men's lives especially—and in women's, too, of course, but the men are the worst victims. It's just as I say, it's a *problem*——" Here Cecilia interrupted herself, glancing at Mrs. Stevens. "I suppose we're a little *modern* for you, Cousin Judith," she said in playful tolerance. "But you won't have to hear any more, your front door's in sight."

Sure enough it was, and Judith descended with pleasant speeches; the automobile rolled off clamorous with renewed discussion of love's problems and even more modern expressions of opinion, she did not doubt, watching it away with a rather

queer look on her own carefully controlled countenance. She let herself in and went upstairs with stiff movements; the afternoon had tired her, even that part of it which was supposed to be restful. Natalie was out somewhere, as usual; their small bedroom bore disordered evidence to her hasty entrance and departure. There were her buckskin shoes lying where she had kicked them off, sundry undergarments draped over a chair, her hat on the bed. Natalie was only careful and neat about her music, the mother thought, a trifle impatiently; she herself was of a tidy habit and could not sit down in peace of mind until she had performed the operation known to women, particularly to mothers, as "picking up and straightening around." She undressed and put on a wrapper, preparatory to sitting up with a book until the girl came in, according to their established custom; but after dropping off to sleep two or three times as she read, finally gave up and turned off the light, and got into bed. In the middle of the night, as it seemed to her, she roused enough to recognize that the other was just stealthily slipping under her own covers alongside. "Is that you?" she asked drowsily.

"Oh, I didn't mean to make any noise!"

"It's all right. Have a good time?"

Natalie's response, "Oh, grand!" was lost in a yawn.

She was sound asleep when her mother woke the next morning; and Mrs. Stevens, in her turn, moved about with caution, putting on her clothes and making her cup of coffee. Natalie could hop out briskly enough and fresh as a flower even after a night's dancing when there was question of an early start on some expedition or entertainment; at other times her mother told herself the fiction dear to all mothers that the child needed all the rest she could get, and left her undisturbed until noon or the next pressing engagement. Judith crept about soundlessly, washing the dishes and dusting; she closed the intervening doors so that the visits of the ice-man and laundry-boy should make as little commotion as possible; and then, after all this care, about nine o'clock, the telephone set up a devastatingly strident peal, more likely to invade and destroy slumber than all the other noises put together! However, it was most probably one of Natalie's own intimates calling up on some of their terrifically important affairs, she thought with a smile, as she went to the instrument, fully expecting to hear a girlish

treble or perhaps some youthfully masculine voice helloing and wanted to know if that was you, Nat? She would have to ask the name, though it would almost surely mean nothing to her when given; she scarcely knew half of Natalie's friends.

The viewless speaker was not one of them, however, as was evident the moment his heavy accents reached her ear. "Hello! I want to speak to Mrs. Stevens. Mrs. *Stevens*. Is she there? . . . Oh, is that you, Mrs. Stevens?"

She assured him that she was Mrs. Stevens, and waited, vaguely interested.

"Well, this is John Applegate. You know me? John Applegate, Cecilia's brother?"

"Oh, *yes!* Mr. Applegate!" said Judith in conventionally pleased tones, and waited again, rather wonderingly this time.

He seemed to hesitate as if uncertain how to go on; she had a fancy that she could hear his troubled breathing. "You—you saw the paper, I suppose?"

Judith herself was dumb for an instant in sheer surprise. "The *paper?*" she echoed.

"Yes, the *paper*—last night, I mean, of course. You saw it? Good Lord, you don't mean to say—don't you *take* it?" demanded John's voice with

what she knew instinctively to be unconscious roughness—the unconscious roughness of a very much worried man. At the same moment it darted across her, first, that the paper had not been lying on their porch twisted into a screw the way the boy always pitched it in, last night when she came home, or else she had not noticed it; she had forgotten all about it. And secondly, that something had happened!

“Why, yes, I take it, only I didn’t see it last night. What is the matter, Mr. Applegate? Has there been—— Is somebody——” She thought chaotically and all at once, as it seemed to her, of railroad and automobile accidents, financial crashes, battle, murder, sudden death—he was speaking again.

“Well, I——” He paused again, but longer and somehow with the effect of an uncertainty more helpless than before. “I thought sure you’d have seen the paper——” He broke off, then made another start, beginning and dropping disjointed sentences, and half questions which he himself half answered. “Then you don’t know—I mean you haven’t heard—— Nobody said anything to you—well, of course, they’d be hardly likely to. Still, you *might* have—— Or you

might have got a letter, or some word, or something, only——” And now Mrs. Stevens imagined she heard other voices, muffled and confused; he was talking to some one else in the room with him, apparently. Then abruptly he spoke into the telephone once more, this time with decision. “I’d like to come over. Right away, please. Could you see me right away?”

“Why, certainly, Mr. Applegate. But what is the matter? Is somebody——”

“Well, all right, I’ll be right over. Now look here, Cecil——” The receiver clanged on the hook. Mrs. Stevens held on to hers a second in complete blankness of mind; then she hung it up and moved off a few steps aimlessly. The thing baffled conjecture, but it was impossible to refrain from conjecturing. Characteristically enough, she thought of her small investments with a chill of fright; Mr. Applegate was a business man, he might have seen something, heard something—she mastered the fancy in contempt. As if he would trouble himself about the sources of her income, even if he knew what they were! He had met her perhaps half a dozen times. She would have concluded that something had happened to Cecilia, but for a conviction that she had

heard him speaking to Cecilia. To Dick, then? Judith paled at the last thought; she was fond of Dick. She remembered him long ago, in old days when he was a little boy—such a dear little boy with brave, brown eyes, sturdy, mischievous, honest; he had been like a younger brother. He was the only one left of all her family. Cecilia had said that he was away, “east on business,” a phrase which invariably means New York City to the Middle Western ear. Another vision of hotel fires and trains crashing through railroad trestles visited her in an instant of sick horror. The door-bell rang.

Mrs. Stevens ran to the stairs. She went down and opened the door in such haste as to be out of breath; her hands were trembling. And after all, it was not Mr. Applegate who was waiting outside; it was Ledyard Lee.

VIII

AFTERWARD, reviewing the first moment of this new surprise, Mrs. Stevens found it impossible to trace the movements of her mind, if indeed it moved at all; she seemed to herself to stand and stare mentally as well as bodily. There must be some very simple explanation for this apparition on her threshold—which Mr. Lee had never attempted before!—at this unsanctioned hour, but she could think of none; it was as mysterious as the other man's overtures, and coming so pat upon them almost as disquieting. She stammered the name in blankness, fairly unhorsed from her conventions: "Mr. Lee!"

Ledyard stared an instant, too, with the odd effect of having momentarily forgotten where he was. Then he hastily jerked off his hat, somewhat incommoded in the act by a handful of newspaper sheets he was holding; the wind caught them and flapped and bounced them noisily about his face. "Mrs. Stevens! Ah—er—good morning!"

She returned the greeting mechanically, stand-

ing with the door half opened, expectant of she did not know what; and after another struggle with the paper, he got it crushed down into a loose bundle and held it out to her with vaguely apologetic words. "I'm afraid it's all dirty. It was blowing around under the bushes, and I thought I'd pick it up for you. Your paper, you know." He stopped in sudden concern. "Or maybe it's one of the neighbors'. I didn't think about that. But it was in this yard."

"Oh, no, I'm sure it's ours from last night. I forgot to take it in," said Judith, gathering herself together, though her mind was now beginning again to range up and down in vain surmise about John Applegate's errand. She took the disordered collection with perfunctory thanks; it was defaced with mud-stains as he had remarked, besides being presumably quite out of date as to its news by this time. Nevertheless, she went to smoothing and straightening it out, though with nervous fingers, her glance, in spite of her, wandering past him up the street. "So much obliged. Do you often go by here?"

He did not answer for so long a moment that Mrs. Stevens noticed it in transient irritation; but it always took time for the veriest commonplace

to penetrate to Ledyard's understanding, she reminded herself, and it was unworthy to lose patience with him for being so slow when he was so kind. Who on earth but Ledyard Lee would have stopped his car and gotten out to rescue another person's newspaper? But——

But here Judith became aware that he was eyeing her in a strange fashion, painfully and laboriously intent, questioning and perplexed; he made an unsteady gesture toward the newspaper. "*Last night?* I didn't look—I thought it was this morning's—the morning *Observer*, you know. I just thought as long as I was here I'd pick it up for you. But if it's last night's, then you haven't seen it yet? *That*—you know? You didn't see *that*?"

It was immeasurably startling. All her apprehensions sprang to formless life afresh, roused not merely by the repeated question echoing the other man ominously, but by something else, something distinctly foreign to this one's tone, and as she now all at once perceived to his aspect. The differences were trivial enough, yet so unnatural as to assume importance. Ledyard was unshaved since yesterday, his linen was careless, his coat wrinkled; there were red rims about his

eyes; normally he was fastidiously cleanly, and had a becoming regard for dress. Mrs. Stevens in one breath entertained and dismissed the successive guesses that he was sick, that he had gone out of his head, that he had been or was now drunk; they would none of them explain the uncanny coincidence of Mr. Applegate's behavior. But now in the midst of her bewilderment, her cloudy alarms, the self-control that was so practiced as to have become instinctive, supported her; it was with her habitual manner of tranquil and amiable interest that she said: "Why, no, I haven't seen it, Mr. Lee. Was there anything of importance?"

"I thought you would surely have seen it," said Ledyard helplessly; he moved his hands in another gesture futile and hopeless. "But it doesn't make a great deal of difference in the long run, I suppose. The only thing is to keep everything from—from—well, it ought not to get too public, you know. I knew you'd understand how that was right away, so that was why I wanted to see you last night, only nobody answered the telephone."

"You called up? I'm so sorry, we were both out——"

He went on, scarcely heeding her. "Then I thought you'd understand, anyhow—I mean my coming in this way this morning, without letting you know or anything. I didn't want to telephone again—I—I *couldn't*, somehow. I just came. It's an imposition, I suppose, But I—I——" The hurried and broken speech trailed off into silence as he looked at her in desperate entreaty.

Again Mrs. Stevens had to fall back on John Applegate to reassure herself as to the other's health and sanity. Whatever had happened seemed to have happened to both of them, and John's agitation, in a degree, excused Ledyard's. But what conceivably could have happened?

"I thought you had seen it," Ledyard reiterated. "I thought you wouldn't mind my coming after seeing that in the paper. It seemed as if you'd understand my wanting to see you, to—to talk over what I'd better do—I mean so as to keep any more from getting in the paper, you know. I feel it's an imposition, but nobody else—that is——"

"Where is it in the paper?" said Mrs. Stevens gently. "You know I haven't seen it yet. I'll read it now, if you want me to—if you'd rather—— Where is it?"

"I don't know. On the front page, I think, The first thing you come to—at least, that's the way it seemed to me. The—the only thing to do, you know, is to stop the publicity. Once the papers get hold of anything—they think it's good business, all the publicity they can manage. You can't blame them, maybe it *is* good business. There was one of 'em called up the house—*my* house—he wanted to ask *me* about it—wanted to know if I had anything I cared to say!" said Ledyard, incredulously. "It's—it's a little hard——"

"Will you come in, Mr. Lee?" Judith said, with some difficulty. Her lips felt stiff and dry of a sudden, her voice sounded strange in her own ears. She had found the paragraph.

"Why, yes, I'd like to. It's an imposition, of course, I—I realize *that*—but I thought maybe you could think of something we could do—I could do, I mean. And I—I thought you might be interested on account of—of Dick," said Ledyard, averting his haggard eyes, as he brought out the name. "You really don't mind my coming to you? I don't seem to be able to think of anything. I haven't slept all night." He looked down over himself in dim surprise. "I don't believe I

went to bed. I don't *remember* going to bed, anyhow!"

Upstairs he sat down thankfully in the chair she offered; he was visibly worn out. But he asked in his usual anxiously considerate way which somehow seemed to her heart-breaking at such a moment, if she minded a cigarette, and tried to light one with his shaking hand, spilling the box of matches and fumblingly picking them up and dropping them again while she reread the few words.

For it was only a few words that had wrought all this havoc, a scant couple of lines among the telegraphic news mentioning with other passengers sailing on the liner *Hibernia* that day, Mrs. Ledyard Lee and R. H. Meryon. The pair had not thought it worth while or perhaps had disdained to resort to false names or any other cheap device of concealment; it was like them both. Perhaps also, it was characteristic of their world that nobody would give them the benefit of a doubt as Mrs. Stevens knew, as poor Lee, for all his slowness of wit, knew only too well. In other circles possibly, a man and woman in their position may set sail for Europe unaccompanied, without notice given, on the same vessel, and

arouse no comment; but on the North Hill—— The scandal must have furnished dinner-table conversation to a hundred households, where it was much to be questioned if it surprised or shocked any one, unless pleasurably. Judith Stevens was a gentlewoman, humane and upright after her fashion, and had a real affection for her cousin; nevertheless, her private verdict was not that of grieved and outraged morality; she only said to herself that she never would have believed the affair would get this far! Everybody knew that it was going on, but who would have expected anything to *come out*? Who would have dreamed that either Dick or Mrs. Lee could be so crazy? And now what was to be done?

She must unconsciously have uttered the last words aloud, for Ledyard took her up eagerly yet deprecatingly as before, stumbling among words, making those aimless, inexpressive gestures, with the cigarette which he had not succeeded in lighting after all, forgotten between his fingers. "I don't know! I *don't* know! That's why I wanted to see you. It's an imposition, but there—there really isn't anybody else that I could think of that would care—or that I'd care to go

to. And by oneself, it's—it's rather hard, you know. I told Evans—he's our butler, he's a very good man—I don't mean good personally, I mean as a butler, of course, I don't know anything about him personally. Very civil and quiet and—well, discreet, I think. I told him to say I was out or had gone away on business or anything he chose, if anybody wanted to see me, or asked questions. He understood, I'm sure. I gave him something—I gave 'em something all around. That ought to keep them from talking, don't you think?"

Mrs. Stevens said of course it would, with all the approval and encouragement she could muster up, although at heart she had not much confidence in this hired loyalty. She could vision the scene, the master of the house with his harrowed, pale face, his enforced calm, thrusting money on this crew of mercenaries, while they stood at attention, maids and men, uniformed, silent, deferential, telegraphing contemptuous understanding to one another with lewd winks and nods and grins behind his back. *They* had known all along; trust them! The kitchen and backstairs know everything about the drawing-room; line their pockets with dollars, and you are still

as much at their mercy as at that of their so-called superiors whose pockets you cannot line. However, when all was said, the pocket-lining was the most effective policy known; those who thought themselves a deal cleverer than Ledyard Lee would be hard put to it to invent a better.

"I don't believe they will talk much, or let themselves be pumped, anyhow. They've all been with us—me—a good while, since long before—before I was married. I think maybe they rather like me—like the place, I mean, of course," he said, shrinkingly revealing this conviction as if it were something shameful; he looked down at the carpet in confusion, the color coming into his leaden-hued face. "I believe they like it. That—that counts, too, you know."

Judith, with a stab of humiliation, acknowledged to herself that it did count; she might have thought of it, she ought to have thought of it! Ledyard, who himself would never have betrayed the trust of an enemy, let alone a friend, liked his underlings and relied on their liking. The simple, kindly, harmless gentleman credited no one, no matter how lowly, with principles less worthy than his own; perhaps therein lay the essence of being a gentleman. She found herself believing

with him that the servants would be faithful; for that matter, how could anybody, beholding him, risk wounding him further?

"There is bound to be some talk, no matter what I do," said Ledyard, moving restlessly again. "I—I daresay there has been some already. I mean for some time past." He went on talking, evidently for the mere relief of talking, of pouring out all that was in his tired mind. "If I had only known—— If Anita had only—— Why, I wouldn't have held her for a minute! You can fix those things up easily—divorces, you know. It could have been managed. She could have said anything she wanted to about me, I wouldn't have denied it or made any fight. For that matter, I was thinking last night of things I could have done, actually *done*, so that—so that she wouldn't have had to tell anything that wasn't strictly *so*. I could have shut myself up in my room, for instance," Ledyard explained circumstantially; "and said some—some words aloud, only in a whisper, because one doesn't care much to do it, you know, although a man naturally knows—or—knows words he can use," said Ledyard, alluding to this extension of the masculine vocabulary with apologetic reticence. "I could

have done that, and she could have said I abused her and—and called her names, you know. And I thought of other things, too, like striking her—just *pretending* to, of course, you understand? A little tap would have done. Then it would have been all right. I mean she could have got her divorce and they could have got married. I would have gone away, of course, and they could have come back here, and everybody would have gone to see them, just as usual, and—and all that, you know. But as it is——” Ledyard lifted his eyes to those of the seasoned woman of the world opposite him for an instant of miserable significance. “As it is——” he repeated, painfully. “Anita—well, I can’t do anything. I can’t do anything except keep it from getting too public. I feel—I’m troubled about Anita. If they’d—if she’d only told me—— I would have wanted her to—to have—to be happy, you know. I wouldn’t have stood in her way——” He halted abruptly, turning his head at the sound of steps and voices below. “There’s somebody else to see you. I’ll go!” He started up, settling his coat, feeling at his tie as if suddenly for the first time conscious of his appearance. “It’s an imposition, anyhow. Awfully kind of you——”

Mrs. Stevens, protesting, with sincerely meant invitations to come again, to come often, to come whenever he chose, was almost as incoherent on her side, realizing while she spoke who these new visitors were, and that Ledyard departing must inevitably come face to face with them, the last people on earth whom he would want to see or who would want to see him. For it was not Mr. Applegate alone who had arrived; she could hear Cecilia's high, clear voice insisting hysterically. They were at the door, they were actually on the stairs, or Cecilia was, at any rate! John's expostulatory grumbling was lost in her outcry, reinforced by the peremptory whirring of the doorbell. "Cousin Judith, Cousin Judith, we can come up, can't we? You left your door open on purpose for us, didn't you? *Do* stop ringing the bell, John; she can't hear me! *Cousin Judith!*" She rushed up, throwing herself into the room and upon Mrs. Stevens with wild exclamations. "You've *seen?* You've *heard?* Oh, *Cousin Judith!*"

The other literally staggered before the onslaught; Cecilia's plump little body outweighed hers by some thirty pounds. Having it hurled upon her in this wise, Judith at first was con-

fusedly conscious only of its firmly brassièred and corseted bulk, of tears, face-powder, braided surfaces, Cecilia's wrist-watch catching in her back hair, Cecilia's sobbing breath in her ear, Cecilia's hat raking the bridge of her nose and sending her eyeglasses flying. Her immediate sensation was one of extreme annoyance which, however, she instantly subdued in self-reproach. She patted Cecilia's heaving shoulders, with sympathetic murmurings; words and action were trite enough, she told herself satirically, but they were correct. John Applegate, with a disturbed and reluctant countenance, occupied the background, unwittingly cutting off Ledyard's retreat. And there they all stood for a dramatic moment which, like most such moments outside the drama, was only hideously embarrassing.

Embarrassing to everybody but Cecilia, that is; she was as engulfed in the sense of injury as a child, and as indifferent to whatever aspects the situation assumed to others, or how it affected them. She clung to Mrs. Stevens in complete emotional abandon, sobbing with broken ejaculations of which the burden was, what was she to *do*, what *was* she to do?

"It's been a good deal of a shock to her, of

course," said her brother awkwardly, meeting Mrs. Stevens' eye. "Now, now, Cecie, you don't want to give way, you know. You'll wear yourself out——"

"I don't care, I don't ca-a-re! Oh, what shall I *do*, what shall I *do*?"

"Now, Cecie——"

"Sit down here; come and sit down!" suggested Mrs. Stevens in tones rather too coolly gentle, as she knew with regret; but with all the good will in the world, it was an effort for her to sustain Cecilia physically and mentally both. Truly, one could hardly expect to assuage the feelings of a deserted wife by inviting her to take a chair; but impromptu, the adequate word did not present itself. What would you have, she reflected with borrowed or perhaps contracted Gallic irony.

"Now, now, Cecie——" said John Applegate again, attempting the soothing manner without signal success. "She *would* come!" he added, with scarcely withheld impatience to their involuntary hostess. Mrs. Stevens surmised acutely that he had been now-nowing for some time and was getting tired of it. For Cecilia refused to be now-nowed into anything even resembling self-control, though she did finally subside among the

cushions on the sofa with demonstrations a shade less tumultuous. After all, one ought not to find fault with the poor thing in this extremity, Judith Stevens thought, with another twinge of compunction. To be sure, it was impossible to figure herself making this devastating scene in another person's house, or even in her own. The position, on the contrary, should call out all a gentlewoman's reserves of dignity and restraint, in Judith's opinion, and there was no position wherein consideration for others was not an essential; but Cecilia was different.

"I feel this is an imposition," Mr. Applegate was saying uncomfortably, yet with perceptible relief in the calm atmosphere of Mrs. Stevens' self-possession. Then he recognized the other man's presence, with a kind of uncertain greeting. "Oh—er—hello!"

Ledyard uttered something inarticulate. They looked at each other without offering to shake hands. Cecilia broke off in the middle of a quavering intake of breath to stare at her fellow-victim. "Oh, Mr. *Lee!*" And there occurred another uneasy pause which Mrs. Stevens endeavored to fill up by busily retrieving her eyeglasses.

"I didn't mean—I didn't expect you'd be here,"

said John more uncomfortably. "Of course, we—I—we wouldn't have——" He mumbled something about intrusion, with an appealing eye on Mrs. Stevens. That lady, however, preserved an attitude of impartial sympathy; there was really nothing more for her to say or do, Judith argued.

"I was just going," said Ledyard. "I only wanted to see Mrs. Stevens a minute." He made a motion toward the door, adding vaguely: "I'm sorry——"

"Oh, it's all right," said the other quickly, and interposed, speaking in an undertone. "This is a kind of bad business—I mean the papers getting hold of it. Excuse my asking, but have any of 'em been after you yet? Because there was some fellow from the *Observer* out at the house——"

"As if I could tell anything when I didn't know anything myself! I never got a letter or *anything!*" cried out Cecie, with sharp indignation among her sobs. "Not one word! Nothing! Not one little tiny scrap! If I'd had a letter or *anything—anything——*"

Her brother's eye dwelt on her a moment in patently hopeless speculation; then it traveled to Mrs. Stevens, but whatever he encountered there caused him to avert it in almost a panic of hurry.

In fact, all through this unhappy episode, honest John was perpetually glancing at and away from the older woman's bland countenance as if fearful of what it or he himself might betray.

"If you'd stop to think of it, I don't know what you'd expect 'em to write, Cecie," he said with a sort of fatigued reasonableness. "Him or her either——"

"*Her!*" Cecilia screamed. "I *wouldn't* want *her* to! That nasty, vile woman! It's all her fault, anyhow. Dick *never* would have—he *never* would have! She's just lured him off, the way *those women* do. She ought to be in a bad house this minute—— She——"

"Now, now, Cecie!" John interrupted, this time raising his voice authoritatively. Perhaps he thought he saw the other man flinch. "It's been a good deal of a shock to her, naturally," he explained again lamely. Ledyard said nothing, and Mr. Applegate turned precipitately to the previous subject. "If they haven't come at you yet, why, they'll begin before long, sure. And what I was going to say was that we ought to get together and fix up some way of keeping it out of 'em—the papers, you know. That's why I thought of you the first thing," he said to Mrs.

Stevens with naïve confidence. "You've always got a good, smooth line of talk, and could give us some points, I expect. Don't necessarily have to tell anything that isn't true, but at the same time——" John made a gesture expressive of a certain liberality of outlook. "At the same time—— We've all got to stick to the same story, of course," he finished warningly.

After a silence during which he might have been turning these suggestions in his mind, though his heavy face gave no signs of any sort of mental effort, Mr. Lee said formally: "Thank you, very much," and again moved to go. John looked at him doubtfully.

"Well, now, see here——" he began, then checked himself, probably taking that second thought which is rumored to be always best. But Judith Stevens got up, upon one of those impulses to which she so rarely succumbed, and put out her hand to the other, and spoke to him by his name with earnest feeling.

"Ledyard, I'll always be here whenever you want to see me—whenever you care to. Please come, I'd like to have you, I *want* you to!"

"That's ever so kind of you. Thank you very much," said Ledyard Lee again; he held her hand

a moment, and went away with his head bowed, tramping heavily down the stairs and down the walk outside. Cecilia's tremulous gasping ceased for the interval while she stared after him with curiosity, and then at Mrs. Stevens.

"You called him by his first name. I didn't know you were such friends."

"I suppose we aren't, really. It's only that I knew his family years ago. I remember him when he was a little boy," said Judith, a little shakily; she had been moved beyond her wont.

"He certainly doesn't seem to mind much. Used to it, I suppose," Cecilia commented savagely. "She never let anything get out before, but this isn't the first time, you needn't tell *me!* *That woman——*"

"Now, now, Cecie——"

"Oh, let me alone, John! You're all the time hushing me up, and—and *sitting down* on me! You *know* she's no better than a——"

"Never mind, *never mind*, you mustn't talk about her so much!" her brother counseled forcibly, reddening, with a glance at Mrs. Stevens. "It doesn't do any good, and it—it——"

"Go on, shield her and stand up for her, do!" said Cecie, the tears welling over afresh. "That's

the way men are! And she's just the kind to **know** how to get around them, and flatter and wheedle and—and make up to them *other ways*, you know *how*, John Applegate! Only I wouldn't have believed she could get you on her side like this, my own brother——”

“Good Lord, I'm *not* on her side!” shouted John in momentary exasperation. “Do be reasonable, Cecie,” he went on, more moderately, commanding himself. “I'm only trying to tell you that it's common-sense and looks better, makes a better impression, not to go gassing round about her, and calling her every name you can lay your tongue to. You oughtn't to have said that before Lee just now. After all, she's his wife—or *was*—that is——”

Cecilia gazed at him over the handkerchief, forgetting her woe in stark inability to comprehend; she burst into shrill mirth. “His *wife*! Oh, my goodness, John! So I'm not to say anything about her to Mr. Lee because she's his wife? Well, there *is* no use talking, sure enough, if that's the way you feel about it!”

“I *mean* it, just the same!” John retorted, somewhat confused, but obstinate. “You don't have to say *anything* to *anybody*—not Lee or anybody

else, can't you *see*? Can't you see that she and Dick have—have—why, they've cooked their own goose, going off together like this! Isn't that so?" he demanded of Mrs. Stevens desperately. "*You* tell Cecie! Make her understand!"

Judith, however, took refuge in that accredited specialty of hers, not inaccurately characterized by Mr. Applegate as a good, smooth line of talk; that is, in reality, she contrived to say nothing at all. The truth was she could not interest herself in Cecilia's points of view or behavior, she could not sympathize with Cecilia even in this crisis when, by every social law, she should have been most interested, most sympathetic. Decidedly, there was something wrong with her, she thought, for the hundredth time in Cecilia's company, with the same sense of guilt. The spectacle of poor Lee had stirred her to her depths; it was with infinite pain that she witnessed the pain of this dull man. But Cecilia only bored her! She was beset by untimely recollections of the "broad" and "modern" statements with which the other had illuminated her no longer ago than last night. ". . . When a man and woman *belong* to each other. . . ." ". . . You can't sit in judgment on *love* . . ." and all the rest of the shoddy salacity

Cecilia recited with such unction, so complacent a belief in her own high-mindedness and originality and daring. Mrs. Stevens caught herself wondering what effect the application of those sounding theories would have in the present case. Would Cecilia be conscious of its irony? Or would those friends of hers, who were equally ready with cheap declarations to prove the Seventh Commandment a dead letter? Judith doubted it exceedingly, but was too humane to experiment. Her humanity was part and parcel of her self-respect, and she exercised it, as she knew in her heart, in deference to her own good opinion, not out of feeling for Cecilia. For she could not make herself sorry for Cecilia; it was Dick that she was sorry for, and perhaps even a little for Mrs. Lee! They were unpardonably and unforgettably sinners; and Cecilia was a good woman, a cruelly wronged woman; nevertheless—— Mrs. Stevens gave up the riddle.

They went at last; and after a wait of a minute or so, Natalie cautiously inched the bedroom door open a crack and peeped out. Her mother, catching her, gave an exclamation of mixed amusement, weariness and irritation. "Natalie! Don't

be ridiculous! Come on in! It's over, thank Heaven!"

She fell into the nearest chair, and Natalie emerged in her light silk dressing-gown, with bare arms, her brown hair kinking around her bright, dark face that just now was alive partly with curiosity, partly with a kind of light concern. "That was Cousin Cecilia, wasn't it! What was the matter? Have she and Cousin Dick had a fuss?"

Mrs. Stevens told her briefly; she might have condensed the shabby story still more, for comprehension began to show on Natalie's face after the first few words. "Oh, *that!*" she said. "I saw that in the paper. I thought it looked queer. I think everybody saw it."

"Didn't any of them say anything?"

The girl shook her head. "Not to me, at any rate."

"That was probably because they all know he's your cousin."

"No, I don't believe anybody would have stopped because of that. It's just that they don't care much, anyhow," said Natalie, coolly. "Everybody knew about Cousin Dick hanging around her, but nobody talked about it *much*."

You know how it is, mother. He and the Lees and all their friends are ever so much older than *we* are. We just don't think about them any more than they think about us. You *can't*, you know. You haven't got the time!"

"Oh! Well, I should think you would have said something to me about it last night. Why didn't you?"

"I don't know. I forgot, I suppose," said Natalie, simply.

They were both silent, Mrs. Stevens considering somewhat uncomfortably the impersonal attitude of the younger generation toward every event, no matter how grave, which does not directly affect itself. It seemed to her, in retrospect, that her own had been more catholic in its tastes and sympathies, more at one with its elders in outlook, beliefs and prejudices; but that, she reflected with wry good-humor, was the familiar plaint of old age. Youth, American youth, at least, is notoriously either rebellious or indifferent. Wonder visited her as to how a French girl of Natalie's age would have received this bit of family news. Probably she would not have been allowed to know anything about it; certainly she would have been trained

to dissemble knowledge. The Gallic system of upbringing, according to our way of thought, does not make for good morals; and ours, any Frenchman would retort, does not make for good taste! There might be justice on both sides.

"I can't see what they all came down on *you* for," said Natalie. "*You* can't do anything about it."

"Oh, I only think they wanted somebody to talk to. Somebody *safe*, that is."

"I suppose that must have been it," said Natalie, thoughtfully. "With Mr. Applegate and Mr. Lee, that is. She'd talk to anybody. She's a perfect pill."

"Oh, don't say things like that about poor Cousin Cecilia, Natalie. She——"

"Yes, she is, mother, you know it. Of course, it's a pity about Cousin Dick, and one feels sorry for her, and all that," said Natalie, without any appearance of sympathetic distress, however. "But she's a pill, just the same. A complete, entire, finished, absolute pill!"

IX

WHETHER owing to Mr. Applegate's activity or to Mr. Lee's inactivity, it is a fact that the Lee-Meryon scandal was suffered to pass quietly into oblivion without another word of notice, from the newspapers, at any rate. On the North Hill, there was talk, but not much more, taking it by and large, than there had been before; the North Hill was always discreet in public, whatever it whispered over privately; perhaps some caste spirit such as still survives here and there even in the technically unfavorable atmosphere of this democracy, held its members together in a kind of loose and easy-going loyalty, and the gossip, slander, backbiting that undoubtedly went on within Everybody's gates, it was tacitly understood was not to be shared with the Anybodies and Nobodies outside. After a decent interval, so as to avoid the most remote suggestion of evasion or withdrawal, Ledyard Lee packed up and set out for the South Seas, equatorial Africa, the Antarctic Pole, or where you choose. Society

waked one fine morning to hear that he had gone, and to see the house empty, locked and forbidding with its shuttered windows in the middle of the gardens and terraces that had beckoned so invitingly. After a while the place began to have a rather unkempt look as unoccupied property will, though there was a caretaker in charge, and Mr. Lee had left instructions for everything to be kept in the usual order against his return. That bade fair to be at some very distant and uncertain date, however; months later, somebody coming back from a trip to the Orient, reported running across him in Yokohama; he turned up afterward at the Cape, and was known to have passed the succeeding winter in Rio Janeiro. What he did with himself on these long, aimless journeyings, it was hard to imagine; wherever he went he always seemed to be alone. He did not interest people or make friends readily. One might fancy him playing innumerable games of solitaire, smoking hundreds of cigars companionless, ordering dinners for one and buying single theater tickets all over the world—poor Ledyard! Yet he was not at all a tragic figure, nor in the least pitiful even to those who knew his history. Don Meigs used to say that you wondered in one

breath how Lee's wife could stand him and how she could leave him; and that light deliverance may exhibit him more clearly than pages of description.

Meanwhile, what of the other martyr, the chief martyr as she considered herself and was considered by her circle most justifiably? Cecilia stayed at home. "What else can I do?" she would inquire with a mournful little smile, and bravely suppressing a sob, would add: "The house is in my name, that's *one* thing, anyhow! It's the simplest possible little Colonial place, you know." Recourse to her mother, in the style classic for abandoned wives, it appeared was out of the question. "Oh, I can't have her here with me. Ever since papa died she's lived with Bob, you know," Cecilia explained conclusively. "One can't disturb people—at least *I* don't feel as if *I* could just because of my private sorrow——" a sentiment which never failed to elicit the round of sympathetic applause it merited. There was a vague general impression that the old lady Applegate was something of a Tartar; but Bob's wife, on the other hand, was a meek little mouse, well suited to getting along with her, besides being inured to it by this time, so that Cecilia's

decision not to upset existing arrangements was demonstrated to be not only unselfish but admirably practical. John broke up his bachelor quarters and went to live with her; John knew all about Cecilia's private sorrow already, and nobody cared how much *he* was disturbed!

For that matter, in an astonishingly short while, everything was going on as evenly as if there had been no devastating change at all, as if the disgraceful revolution had never occurred. Cecilia herself described it as affecting her in somewhat the same manner as a dreadful dream. "I feel sometimes as if it were all a *dreadful dream*," she said. "One of *those dreams*, you know! I've so often wished I had the gift, I would write about it. I wrote a good deal at college in my sophomore year; I really meant to make it my career. Then other things came along, fraternity things and athletic and social affairs—you know how busy you always are at college—so I let it go. But I've often thought seriously of taking it up again and doing something with it. Only I don't know—everything is so highly specialized now, even writing. Still, I'd like to try. I feel my experience would be so interesting if I could just *write* about it, instead of just *telling*

it this way; and it would reach a much larger audience, too. But that's how it seems to me sometimes—as if I'd had a *dreadful dream*——”

As may be inferred from the above quotation, Cecilia's private sorrow was in fact as nearly a public one as her individual exertions could make it. She saw no reason why she should not talk about it; *she* had done nothing shameful. On the contrary she had been sinned against in the most bitter, most brutal way a husband may sin against a wife; and there was not a single circumstance to offer in extenuation. It was imperative that this be known. If she had been nagging, or selfish or extravagant, or merely unappreciative and uncongenial; or if—which Heaven forbid!—she had herself shown a disposition toward light morals and behavior, there would have been some semblance of excuse for the outrage. But Cecilia could hold up a flawless record; she could point to her whole past and defy the closest scrutiny, not alone of her friends, but of her enemies, if the good and noble woman had any. Cecilia *knew* that she was good and noble, and she cannot be blamed in the circumstances for wanting the world at large to know it, too. The trouble was the inherent unwillingness of the world at large

to be convinced on that point, or if convinced, to display it properly. It seemed to her that no one ever believed her quite enough, or with enough force. She told everybody everything, she told it in the most minute detail; and they listened, they sympathized, they condemned, applauded, waxed indignant on the right side, at the right moments—yet at the last left her unsatisfied, even the warmest of them!

Another woman, in her place, might have begun, by and bye, to take a tentative pleasure in freedom, might even have gotten a sort of vengeful solace out of it. According to the unwritten feminine code, it is one thing to keep house for a husband, and entirely another to keep it for a brother. The latter job is relieved of certain responsibilities, such, for instance, as dressing up and making home happy. Who ever heard of a sister spending time and a carking anxiety on a toilette meant to delight the eye of a mere brother, or striving at high tension to entertain, amuse and distract him? Who ever makes a scene about his going out of a night, and lies awake in torments of worry until the sound of his returning latch-key? Who suffers under his criticism of the pie, or trembles to confess to him

the calamitous deficit in the monthly allowance? One has all the fun of managing a house for a man at his expense just as in the other association, but without any of its incredibly small yet incredibly painful trials, defeats, bitternesses. All this was conspicuously true in John's case; never was there an easier man to live with, one who made less trouble or was so little in the way. He gave to Cecilia freely and exacted no accounting, hardly ever objected to a bill or to what came on the table, bolted his breakfast over the morning paper, indifferent to whether the coffee was hot or cold, weak or strong, got out of the house as soon as possible, and did not come home to dinner six nights in the seven. It was ideal. But Cecilia took little comfort in it, perhaps because it did not differ enough from the life she had been leading for ten married years. Dick, too, was open-handed and uncritical, and really much more punctilious in matters of good taste and daily courtesy than John. He listened or pretended to when Cecilia talked, he submitted to the processes she called entertainment with the best grace in the world, and he stayed at home in the evenings. Cecilia had believed herself indispensable to him; she knew without rancor that she was not indis-

pensable to her brother ; but lo, the atmosphere of the house was very much the same !

It prompted the hateful thought that all this while she had never been in reality near to Dick at all ; it might be the fault of Mrs. Lee that he had strayed this last year, as Cecilia vehemently assured herself and everybody else ; but how about all those previous years ? She did not go so far as to suspect that the same humanity, self-respect and habits of good breeding that kept him waiting on and humoring her and smiling mechanically at her wit were all that actually held him to her. Cecilia was incapable of so close a guess, incapable of knowing or fearing that he could be bored ; nevertheless, there had been moments when his impeccable civility subtly disquieted her. Politeness, as Cecilia understood it, was the scheme of conduct in obedience to which one said please and thank you, and learned to eat nicely ; the idea that it was based ultimately upon intelligence, and that it entailed a sympathetic endeavor to put up with other people and get at their points of view would have been incomprehensible to her—incomprehensible, therefore more or less questionable. She herself was honesty incarnate ; when she did not admire she would not let it be

even supposed that she admired; what she disliked or disapproved of, that she condemned aloud and openly; she never told a white lie, or compromised with her conscience to spare another person's feelings or save his face, in her life. Politeness so practiced was to Cecilia nothing short of rank duplicity; and somehow or other it was definitely associated in her mind with that division of society represented by the North Hill, the Sloane-Macreadys, Mrs. Ledyard Lee—the entire circle, in short, of which Dick had been a member all his life.

They had met at a little resort in the Virginia mountains one unforgettable summer, the summer Cecilia was twenty-one. The Gap was an inexpensive place as such places go, like all the others where the Applegate family must perforce take its outings; not for Applegate purses are Newport, Bar Harbor, Hot Springs, where congregate those to whom Cecilia's mother invariably referred as "that rich, stuck-up, society crowd." Cecilia had been brought up to think about a certain section of the populace in those terms; lacking personal knowledge, she could not judge independently. To tell the truth the society crowd seemed to have no definite limits or

hall-marks, other than the peculiar habits of its members. They kept to themselves in their big, handsome houses, some of them in houses not so big and handsome; their young people went to private schools at home and finished off at other private schools and colleges of old renown in the Atlantic Coast states. Every winter they would be giving coming-out parties for their daughters, and balls and teas floridly reported in the "Society Jottings" columns of the *Observer*, where the same names appeared again and again. Manifestly all this took money, and if there were some wanting it, who yet kept their footing by virtue of other qualities as accidental and intangible as birth or personal endowment or merely a community of ideas and standards, Cecilia never would have believed it. She herself, her people, all her friends and acquaintances, were as worthy of public notice as these others, but no one ever read *their* names in the *Observer*. Even away from home and all sources of information, Mama Applegate could unfailing identify individuals affiliated with the stuck-up society crowds of other cities. Her formula was simple if arrived at by some occult process of reasoning not easy to follow, and expressed in a highly figura-

tive style, to wit: you never know where they are.

“Oh, ever so pleasant and smooth-spoken, and butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth!” she would observe acidly of some chance-met lady who come under the taboo. “But that’s as far as she goes. Do you think she’d introduce you to a friend of hers, or invite you around, or have Cecilia to her young folks’ parties? Don’t you fool yourself! She wouldn’t. They’re all that way, that society kind. Everything’s for *show* and *surface* with them, but you never know where they are. Well, of course, it takes all kinds of people to make a world, but I wasn’t raised that society way and I just *won’t do it!*” said Mrs. Applegate with prodigious firmness. “Everything sweet and lovely on top and to your face, and say anything they want to behind your back! I always say that everybody that meets *me* knows all about me, the best and the worst, right from the start; they know exactly where to put me, and I’m always *there*. And I don’t believe in putting on airs and looking down on other folks because they haven’t got as much money as you have, either; that’s not my idea of Christianity. Anyway, if this country isn’t *equal*, I always say, why, what are we

coming to? It's a principle with me to treat everybody alike, and there isn't anything makes me so mad as to see people uppity and stand-offish and picking around who they'll know and who they won't know. And then turning round and pretty nearly killing themselves being nice to you when they're thrown with you and can't get away! Next time they see you, ten to one they don't remember you. There's that Mrs. Henry D. Meigs, goodness knows she hasn't got so much to boast of, her husband was just a common, ordinary country storekeeper to begin with, the *commonest* kind," said Mrs. Applegate, with a scorn singular to witness in so sincere a believer in and practitioner of the principles of equality. "But he made money and got up in the world and there you are! She's got that worthless boy Donelson, you know, and the girl's married to some other good-for-nothing, an English lord or something. I met her once in Washington when Mr. Applegate and I were East on a trip, and he knew Mr. Meigs, and *he* introduced us as we were standing there in the lobby of the Willard. We came right face to face with them so *he* introduced us, and she was as nice as you please. But at home—— From that day to this she's never

known I was on the earth. Walk right by me, and never see me! Of course, it doesn't happen very often because I don't know any of the people she goes with, and I don't want to, if they're anything like she is and they all *are*. But if I ever *do* meet her again, I've made up my mind what I'm going to do. I'm just going to *draw myself up!*" Mrs. Applegate illustrated this spirited intention. "And I'm going to say, '*Oh, Mrs. Meigs and I are already acquainted, only hitherto she's not seen fit to remember it!*' I guess that'll give her something to think about! It makes me sick to see people act that way, that's all I've got to say——" With which, as not infrequently happens, she went on and said a good deal more. It was in the same vein, however, and her audience agreed readily, bringing forward many similar anecdotes and scraps of high-flavored gossip in support of their views. Everybody always knew where *they* were!

Has it been said that Mrs. Applegate was more or less of a dictator in her household? Opinions of an equal sense and justice delivered so emphatically rarely fail of an impresison anywhere, certainly not among young people who never hear anything to the contrary. Cecilia, ever since she

was old enough to listen and understand, had taken without question every pronouncement of her elders, such as the above, and believed it as devoutly as they did; they were upright and conscientious men and women who tried with all their might to do their duty and bring up their children in the way they should go. To be sure, she was not troubling her twenty-one-year-old head much that summer about the nefarious doings of the stuck-up society crowd; she was a pretty girl, she had a satisfactory wardrobe, the young men were attentive, and there was no time to spend on the particular branch of social study favored by Mrs. Applegate and the other hotel-verandah mothers. Their very definite notions about the stuck-up society crowd were all securely packed away in the recesses of Cecilia's mind, but—to pursue the metaphor—they were seldom or never taken out and aired. Then one fine day young Richard Meryon came, and without effort or intention, in fact, quite unconsciously, disturbed, all but dislodged them.

Dick had been out of Harvard about five years; and this summer he and another young fellow, Lawrence Holt, the same one that was killed during our advance in the Argonne some few

summers later, invested in a third- or fourth-hand automobile, and light-heartedly set forth questing adventure. They got it in plenty, albeit of a not wholly picturesque order. There were not so many good roads and good stopping-places in those days, the gasoline-stations were farther apart, the cross-roads smithy had not yet been converted into a garage and repair-shop. The boys christened their ramshackle piece of mechanism *Io*, and if you rashly inquired why, they would reply with imbecile merriment, because *iodide*. They sweated up hills without number, they struggled along on flat tires, they spent untold sums on tows; they slept more than once in some friendly barn, more than once they were caught in drenching downpours; it was an odyssey of mishaps and actual hardships endured in the guise of play. One wonders if Larry recalled it once in a while that other summer, his last, bivouacking under the weather in the torn French countryside. They both thrived on the life, waxed brown and hearty and hard as nails; and finally in the course of their uncharted meanderings, arrived at The Gap one Saturday evening while the weekly hop was in progress, bathed, shaved, got into civilized clothing, ate a gargantuan din-

ner and settled down, as it turned out, for the remainder of their vacation.

As touching Mr. Meryon, little Miss Applegate's pretty brown eyes and fresh coloring and dainty roundnesses undoubtedly had something to do with the stay. It was easy enough to get an introduction at The Gap; that he had never seen or heard of her at home was a matter of no importance to Dick; if he thought about it at all it was only to regret that such a prize had escaped him all this while, and to hope anxiously that she had escaped the other men, too. The young man was essentially modest and unassuming; had he been told of the commotion his first attentions roused in Cecilia and for what specific reason, he would have heard with half amused, half angry disbelief. For Cecilia in the beginning was divided between the natural pleased vanity of a girl who has made a conquest, and a naïve astonishment at the novel perspective of the stuck-up society crowd it opened to her vision. Dick belonged to it, trust Cecilia and her mother and all the rest who argued *à la mode* Applegate to know *that!* His was one of the *Observer* names; they were all familiar with it. The arresting, the inexplicable thing was that he was not stuck-up

at all; apparently he never dreamed of looking down on anybody, with money or without; no one ever knew him to flaunt his family and position; and so far from not knowing where he was, everybody found him as securely stationary as Mrs. Applegate herself. Even that lady had no fault to find with his attitude; quite the contrary! And unkind onlookers might have detected certain ironies about the situation as it affected her. She discussed Cecilia's engagement with ever so slight a superiority of manner, seldom omitting casual reminders that her future son-in-law was "one of those Meryons at home—*the* Meryons, you know."

As it happened, there were few of *the* Meryons left; Dick was the last of his branch, and the old South End house had already passed into other hands. He used to speak with affection of his cousin, Mrs. Charles Stevens, who was living abroad, and there were other relatives scattered about the country. But it was not these whose names Cecilia inscribed so delightedly when it came to addressing the wedding invitations; it was those of the stuck-up society crowd that gave her and her mother the keenest gratification—will it be believed? Relatives had to be asked any-

how, and they would all come if it was humanly possible. Uncle Joe Turney and Aunt Sallie, who lived on the farm out at Fosters' Crossing, would come—no stopping them! All the Stapps would come, the whole seven, papa and mama and the five girls; some people never will learn anything. And that old maid, Nannie Manders, would come to a dead certainty. She never missed a wedding or a funeral, you couldn't keep her away with a club, and the best to be hoped was that she wouldn't bring that awful nephew she had living with her, Libbie's son. All of them had a right to expect invitations, and of course they were the finest kind of people, the salt of the earth, who would do anything for you if you were in trouble and were as dependable as could be; you always knew where they were. Nevertheless, it is the dire fact that the prospect of shuffling them in with those others on the groom's list, the Rudds, MacQuairs, Boardmans, Mrs. Henry D. Meigs—yes, even Mrs. Henry D. Meigs!—and all the rest of the North Hill and elsewhere, gave Mrs. Applegate, that whole-souled and sincere advocate of democracy, some very uncomfortable quarters of an hour. Cecilia was not quite so much concerned; she was too

excitedly happy. Dick seemed to her so perfect a lover, she took such pride in parading him before her friends, none of whom, she was complacently aware, had ever met his like before. He always dressed the right way, he infallibly said and did the right thing, he gave her the most wonderful presents, he knew *everybody*, he went *everywhere*, he had the *sweetest* nature and his *mentality* was stupendous!

So they were married and lived happily ever afterward until—— Cecilia could not remember a harsh word from him, scarcely even an impatient one, all these ten years; and as to jealousy, the idea had never entered either of their heads. The poor thing used to review their past in hopeless perplexity. If it had been a series of quarrels, if he had consistently interfered with her choice of friends and pursuits or shown himself disdainful of them, if he had been given to dangling after other women, Cecilia thought she could have understood; certainly she would not have been so unprepared for catastrophe. But Dick was the farthest possible remove from a despot; it was not often that he asked what she did or was going to do, and in no case had he ever chided her. In private as in public he was

always the same, courtesy and thoughtfulness itself, whimsically gallant, charming. How could he have kept that up and been thinking of somebody else all the time? It was as if this Mrs. Lee had cast a spell over him; he was blindly infatuated with her. *Blindly*, that was it, Cecilia repeated to herself, because there was no understanding Mrs. Lee's fascination; her looks were not above the average, and her *mentality* Cecilia considered far below it. She never would have achieved any prominence in the Women's Club among those representative women; probably that was the reason she had never attempted to join it. With the cunning of a small nature, she must realize that she could not risk a comparison with the brilliant, powerful, almost masculine mentalities there assembled. No, she appealed to Dick on the fleshly side, taking advantage of the lowest male weakness. So Cecilia decided triumphantly; but even this black indictment did not utterly satisfy her; perhaps the trouble was that Mrs. Lee's appeal, gross as it was, had been so successful. One might have supposed that Cecilia would be content in the consciousness of having so much the better of the other as regarded *mentality*; but somehow it was no less

hateful to have to acknowledge Mrs. Anita's superiority in the other line.

After a while she resumed her activities in the club and by degrees in the lesser organizations of which she was a member, warmly urged on by her friends. It would be unkind to hint that they had heard about as much of Cecilia's wrongs as they could stand, and were desirous of giving her a larger field; but there were not wanting subscribers to Mrs. Applegate's open statements that after all, Cecie was not having such a bad time, with no husband around to bother about, as long as John took care of her. She could still have her auto and run around as much as ever; and as for Dick Meryon, he used to go with that stuck-up society crowd before they were married, and although he always seemed nice enough in his way, you never really knew where to put him. None of those people had ever gone out of their way to make friends with Cecie, on his account, which was no loss, for she never cared for them; and she might just as well go on living her life without him, and get used to it.

"So that's what I'm trying to do," Cecilia said with her heroic smile, repeating this advice to Mrs. Stevens, who smiled, too, as sympathetically

as one can while at the same moment swallowing a yawn. "But it all seems like a dream still, one of those terrible dreams. It was the very afternoon we went to the club, don't you remember?"

"Yes, indeed! Does *that* seem like a dream?" Mrs. Stevens asked with a stir of curiosity. "There was some question of—of—er—of precedence——" It was difficult even for the experienced, the resourceful Judith to phrase the inquiry acceptably, but by good luck she did not have to go any farther. Cecilia interrupted, bridling; her color rose, her voice sharpened.

"You mean about introducing Mr. Flink? There wasn't really any *question*, Cousin Judith. I had the prior right, as everybody knew, even Mrs. Brodhead herself. But she simply cannot *endure* to—to take a back seat, if you'll excuse my putting it in that crude way. She'll *die* but what she'll be conspicuous! She never loses a chance to take advantage of her position as president to make herself the central figure of every one of the club functions. Of course, it's all right, and I haven't the slightest criticism to make, except that *I* never looked at the duties of a president in that light, when *I* was in office. *My* conception was to—to——" Cecilia fumbled

for an instant, perhaps at some loss for her conception. "Well, not to efface myself, of course, but to—er—never to put any restraint on individual rights, if you know what I mean——"

Mrs. Stevens adjusted her features to an expression of understanding. "Oh, *yes!*" she murmured appreciatively.

"I don't want to be understood as not *admiring* Mrs. Brodhead," Cecilia assured her quickly and earnestly. "She is a very able, brilliant woman, one of the best executives we've ever had. It's just that she has that one weakness, and nobody's perfect. Her name's up for a second term, but I know ever so many of the most influential members that aren't going to vote for her—this is strictly between ourselves, of course, Cousin Judith—on account of what happened that day, you know. They've come and told me so themselves. They all say they can't *stand* her egotism; the club isn't any place for egotism. She'll get elected, anyhow, everybody always does the second term. It's a mere complimentary formality. But that's how people feel about her privately, so you see it's not mere prejudice or self-importance on *my* part!" Cecilia halted a little out of breath with the emphasis and volubility of these statements;

and there was a moment's pause while the older lady surveyed her thoughtfully.

"It's very nice for you to have something you're so interested in," she said. "Such a resource."

"Oh—er—yes, it *is*!" said Cecilia, somehow disconcerted; she had momentarily forgotten her tragic rôle, and resumed it in haste. "Everything else seems like a terrible *dream*—one of those *dreams*, you know——"

X

THE following winter was Miss Natalie Stevens' second in society, or would have been if between Thanksgiving and Christmas, just as the season was getting into swing, Mr. Gustav Lindstrom of the faculty of the Academy of Music had not suffered a severe attack of influenza. It confined him to his bed for weeks, ultimately sentencing him to Southern California for a life in the open with permanently impaired lungs; and thither the unfortunate gentleman journeyed, and at last accounts was doing well at the head of a choice little orchestra of strings, understood to be connected with the moving-picture studios. But in the meanwhile, what was to become of his department—Violin, Sight-reading and Harmony—at the Academy? The difficulty was met by getting Miss Stevens to fill the post temporarily, with a minor title and salary; they called her assistant instructor and gave her only fifteen hundred a year—*only!* To Natalie, whose standards were still in the main those of her European

bringing-up, it was a spacious sum. One hundred and twenty-five dollars a month, and three months of rest and idleness if she chose, or the comparatively light work and extra pay of summer school! Of course, teaching was something of a strain on nerves and temper—— “But I shan’t have the beginners, and the advanced ones aren’t so bad,” she told her mother confidently. “Then during the winter they always have their series of artists’ recitals, so the teachers have a chance to show; and maybe I’ll get an engagement for solo-work, out of town, you know, or somewhere. I’d love *that!*” Her thin, dark, spirited face fired; she looked off, plainly incarnating the many lights, the wide, whispering hush of the auditorium, the majestic voice of the symphony. The most interesting feature of the picture, no doubt, was her own figure and violin in the middle of it, and no doubt the whole scene faded out in a perfect cyclone of applause. Natalie came back to the present and an unabashed mingling of practical considerations with artistic fervors. “Fifteen hundred! It’s money! Just think what a lot of francs that would make! The first thing I’m going to get is a marten scarf, and a lynx one for you. And then I’ll—or we might save it all up

and go over next summer, Mother. Wouldn't that be fun? Let's! You'd like to go back, wouldn't you?"

"Not for good, Natalie? You don't really want to *live* there again?" said Mrs. Stevens, much perturbed. She gazed lingeringly around the little room to which her care and taste had imparted a kind of frugal and cleanly distinction; she would have said to herself that she had grown attached to it if the idea of growing attached to a Saint Louis flat had not seemed transcendently absurd. Out of the window she could see the Saint Louis opposite with a couple of milk-bottles posed on the front windowsill; they were always there, a part of the suburban picture, only varied by the introduction on the porch during warm weather of a mosquito-barred, basket-work vehicle called by Natalie a pram and by the rest of the street a baby buggy. Next door there was a bungalow with its façade similarly embellished; all the way up and down other Saint Louises and bungalows with other bottles of milk and pram baby buggies contributed to the vista a characteristically American atmosphere, homely and self-satisfied. The grocer's boy swept up the back stairs and into their kitchen like a riotous

tide, leaving wreckage on the table, half a pound of butter, a package of soap powder, the vanilla; he stuck his head around the swing door, yodeled: "Yoo-hoo! Baxter's!" and swept out and down again, receding. A year ago, Judith Stevens would have thought this perspective and environment uncouth, she would have made critical comparisons not invariably to the advantage of her native land. Now dismay invaded her to visualize what parting from it would mean; another uprooting, another flitting! And she had spent so much of her life on the wing, perching for a summer here, a winter there, on whatever shelf offered and making out of it a forlorn travesty of a home. This time it had been a real one; notwithstanding ten years of agreeably finished and intricate civilizations across the Atlantic, notwithstanding the advent here in America of a new generation which at times seemed to her Victorian prejudices hardly civilized at all, her country was her country still, preferable to all other countries. She had a moment of amused horror, picturing herself going about ingenuously proclaiming contentment, optimism and good-feeling like those other "terribly happy Americans" of the old Marquise de St. Pol's observa-

tion—and of her own, too, for that matter! Only a little while, perhaps, and she would be as Cecilia Meryon, and all the other Cecílias, very busy, very important, very “representative,” holding high places in clubs, revering “culture,” pursuing shoddy aspirations with an innocent and trustful sincerity that somehow dignified them. And why not, she demanded inwardly, suddenly impatient with herself, why not? Her countrywomen’s ill-aimed or altogether aimless activities, their restless chase after every fad that promised end-of-the-rainbow results in the way of individual or universal betterment, uplift, regeneration, their eager, sanguine acceptance of any philosophy, any creed, any cult, any preachment, any catch-word whatsoever so long as it proclaimed itself new and an advance upon all previous ones—all this imparted to their daily life a zest and interest beyond comparison with the deadening narrowness of the average woman’s existence on the elder continent. Over there, they did not know that there was anything new or different in the world, and, good heavens, they did not care! From mother to daughter they were satisfied with the same thing, and paced the same dull round within the walls of caste, high, middle or low.

It disconcerted Judith to think that she herself might insensibly have assimilated something of that hard-and-fast attitude, that unexpectant outlook during those ten years of association. Perhaps her social vision, so to call it, had been narrowed, too, by certain inherited limitations, now out of date. She, too, belonged to a caste; all men were free, of course, but she was quite sure that all men were not by any means equal, even in this democracy. Maybe she was wrong; maybe the Cecilias, who knew nothing of caste or to whom the word was a synonym for something vaguely distasteful, had, after all, the root of the matter. Maybe——

Natalie spoke, breaking in upon these inconclusive reflections; there was nothing inconclusive about Natalie's. She, at least, knew her own mind and was unafraid of the future or of external influences; she did not dream that these last had been at work upon her. It was her mother who, half in relief, half in regret, realized that she was very different from last year's Natalie. What had become of that shy and questioning miss, obedient to maternal dictates, given to small outbreaks of temper, touched with the sophistication of the old world that was diametri-

cally opposed to the sophistication of the new? She was gone, and in her place was a brisk, independent young woman, ready to make her own decisions and stand by them, referring to her art almost in the terms of a trade, eager for the fray of competition, and, strangest of all, by her own unconscious showing, quite forgetful of that social career she had been so painstakingly launched upon, or indifferent to it. "Oh, *no!* I only meant we might go for a vacation," she was saying. "No, I wouldn't *live* over there again. Home is the place if one wants to *do* anything. Fancy what I'd make teaching or playing in concerts if we went and settled down in any of those places where we were all the time I was studying! And you know how one has to fight for a hearing; *here* everybody has a chance. Of course over there the money would go farther, but that would only be because we would really do without what everybody has here, *everybody*, and doesn't think anything of it. Freeze in winter, and no decent bath, and your wash done once in about forty years—and oh, mother, don't you remember the pumpkin soup at the Pension Loubet?"

Mrs. Stevens remembered it; well she remembered that terrific dish, and she burst out laugh-

ing at Natalie's humorously tragic accents. "Yes, and the boiled fish three times a week, and the salsify! What did they do to the salsify? It tasted like scraps of excelsior fried in axle grease. What *could* they have done to it?"

"*Vous me direz!*" said Natalie, and shrugged. "I always think of the Loubet when people begin to talk about delicious French cooking."

"It was in Tours, wasn't it?"

"One of those places. They're all alike. Holes! Perfectly beautiful mediæval holes! That's what I was saying," Natalie—who had not been saying anything of the kind!—declared, with tremendous vigor; she wagged her head with a grimace. "No, indeed!" she announced firmly. "I'm going to stay right here. It seemed like burning up money at first, but we're used to it now, and, besides, we'll have more to burn."

"But you will have to work, Natalie."

"Well?" said the girl simply.

"Well, you won't have much time for the—the sort of thing you've been doing; that you're used to, you know," said her mother almost awkwardly. "It's not that I disapprove of your working; you could scrub floors if you wanted to; *that* doesn't make any difference. But you'll have to

give up so much; you won't see nearly so much of your friends, nor have near so good a time——"

"Why, I've *had* it, haven't I?" Natalie cried out, in a kind of laughing impatience. "It was all new and lots of fun, but one can't keep *that* up forever. You can have that sort of good time whenever you feel like it, anyhow. I'm not going to live like a hermit just because I'm teaching at the Academy. What was my violin for and what was all that studying for if I'm not to do anything with it, mother? What did you expect?"

"I'm not quite sure," said Mrs. Stevens, aware, however, in her heart of hearts, that what she had most ardently expected in line with her traditions of a Victorian gentlewoman had been a good match! "I think I had visions of your flourishing around on the concert stage and being a celebrity all in a minute. You *could*, you know, Natalie. Of course, that may come later. In the meanwhile——" She herself shrugged with amiable philosophy. "In the meanwhile, *vogue l'Académie*, eh? I'm glad you don't care about Europe except to visit once in a while."

So it was settled, and Natalie went gaily and

confidently to the Academy, where, to be sure, she presently discovered that a teacher of violin, sight reading and harmony has no sinecure; and doubtless she came home weary and out of sorts after many discouraging days. On the other hand, there were the eccentric characters and happenings of the music school, furnishing novelty to its routine—the sensational little girl from Texas who played Chopin mazurkas, her nine-year-old hands scarcely able to stretch the octaves; the tragic young tenor who was losing his voice, the organization of the Academy Orchestra and Choral Society, Natalie's abbreviated concert trip to Zanesville, Chillicothe and Dayton in company with a couple of other hardy youngsters, a vocal student and a recent graduate from the piano department; the girls made their expenses and came back full of moving tales and projects for a second venture. In the midst of all this bustle of affairs, she contrived to edge in a ball or dinner-dance or theater party now and then; but the cards accumulating dust on her desk or incontinently consigned to the waste basket immediately upon arrival symbolized a decreasing interest which her mother observed and pondered over with wonder, and that admiration which in

girlhood she and her contemporaries had been trained to accord to masculine activities. In those days work was almost exclusively the prerogative of the male half of society, and by a tacit common consent they were excused from caring about parties; perhaps they were excused still on the same grounds, but now the girls were joining them! Everybody worked, or at least everybody had something to do. Among the multiplicity of jobs, it seemed probable that there were some more or less superfluous, some that went begging and some beleaguered with applicants. Mrs. Stevens, not without an ironic amusement, perceived that the young ladies who sought to be secretaries, social workers, instructors in this, that and the other, vastly outnumbered the would-be cooks and waitresses; yea, even the exponents of the domestic arts never wanted to expound them in somebody's home, not even in their own! In this connection she bethought her one day to ask Natalie what Miss Applegate was doing?

"Oh, she has something; she's registrar at the Unemployment Bureau," said the other. "Makes up lists of the names the field workers bring in, and what they can do and all that, you know,"

she added, in explanation, and with an air of detachment. "I daresay it's a good position."

"H'm!" said Mrs. Stevens thoughtfully, tapping her lips with her lorgnette. "Do you ever see anything of her nowadays?"

"Why, no. But then, I never did see very much," said Natalie. And her mother knew this to be true; the two girls had never been intimate, had never gone consistently to the same places or had the same friends. Nothing could be more natural than for them to drift apart; nevertheless, Mrs. Stevens fancied she could detect a certain restraint in the other's manner, as if there were something yet untold. She was far too sagacious, or it may be merely that she respected too much the reserves of others, not excepting her own daughter, to press the inquiry, but in a moment Natalie began to enlighten her voluntarily:

"We had a—well, not a fuss, but she got angry about something, so——" Natalie made a gesture of indifferent renunciation. "We're always as nice as ever to each other whenever we meet. of course, and, anyhow, we don't meet often—why, it wasn't of any importance, mother," she interrupted herself, seeing the consternation on

the older lady's features. "That's one reason I never said anything to you about it."

"*'A fuss'?*" ejaculated Judith Stevens, with almost a physical recoil. To her the word hazily connoted sharp incivilities, red faces, loss of temper and self-control, some sort of noisy, vulgar scene. "I can't imagine how you *could*——"

"I didn't, I didn't!" Natalie made haste to assure her with earnestness. "I never should have thought of—I can't understand it now. How she thinks, I mean, her—her point of view, you know——" She brought out this phrase, which seemed to her rather weighty, with a diffident smile; then all at once became confidential. "It was about Cousin Dick and Mrs. Lee."

Mrs. Stevens' face was a study. "*Cousin Dick and Mrs. Lee?*" she echoed helplessly.

"Yes. You know, mother, everybody had heard—everybody talked a little for months before. I mean we all knew, only nobody thought much about it. You know how it was?"

Her mother made a slight assenting movement. "There was gossip, of course," she said, in her voice of well-bred reticence. "There is always gossip."

"That's just what I tried to tell Marjorie, only

she couldn't seem to see it, somehow. It was one day after it had all happened, you know. She was talking about Aunt Cecie, as she calls her, and, of course, she thinks she's a saint, and she was terribly down on Cousin Dick, and as for Mrs. Lee—*Ouf!*” said Natalie, resorting to an alien exclamation and gesture in default of English adequate to express the other girl's opinion of Mrs. Lee. “And then, when I said something about the talk beforehand, she got perfectly furious with me for not having gone and told Cousin Cecilia!”

Her accent indicated bottomless profundities of astonishment, of inexplicable yet authentic repugnance; she looked confidently to her mother for sympathy, and, indeed, Judith's face gave her complete assurance of it. “She honestly thought I ought to have gone and told Cousin Cecilia the minute I heard——” Natalie reiterated, and they both considered this enormity for a while in silence.

“Well, what did you say when she came down on you in this way?” Mrs. Stevens wanted to know at length, a trifle anxiously.

“Why, mother, I couldn't say anything! Anything she would understand, I mean. I saw

that. I just said the idea of telling Cousin Cecilia never came into my head. Then she said, why didn't it? And I just had to say I didn't know, I simply never thought of such a thing," Natalie confessed, with the same helplessness she must have betrayed when Marjorie posed the question. "There were dozens of people who could have told her, but none of them did. I'm sure Jack Harkness knew—I mean I'm sure he'd heard the talk. And Rannie MacQuair. Because we were going past the end of the links one evening last summer in Jack's car, and we all saw him coming away from the house. Marjorie was with us, and she saw him, too, and wanted to stop, but the men wouldn't; I know they knew by the way they acted. But they never said anything any more than I did. Imagine any one of us rushing off and telling Cousin Cecilia! But Marjorie was perfectly furious. She said I could have prevented all the trouble if I had told!"

Mrs. Stevens permitted her countenance to relax in a sort of dry smile. "She really said that, Natalie? That's very refreshing!" she remarked. "It seems to me, though, that you would have made nearly as much trouble as you would have prevented—only of a different kind." A whole

series of shabby domestic scenes derolled before her in a twinkle. No revelation to Cecilia could have averted tragedy; it was due, either sharp and sudden, or lingering with a wretched vitality for months, years, the rest of their lives. And it seemed as if Cecilia, sempiternally persecuted by jealousy and persecuting in her turn in the ghastly atmosphere of that home, would scarcely have been as well off as she was to-day, posing comfortably in the aureole of recognized goodness, of undeserved suffering. "I rather think the affair was already beyond you," Mrs. Stevens told her daughter. "But what was the reason that Miss Applegate herself didn't act as—er—as deputy Providence? Hadn't *she* heard any of the gossip?"

Natalie shook her head. "No. I don't think she knows any of the people well enough. Cousin Dick's and Mrs. Lee's friends, or—or *anybody*. She roasted us all, anyhow," said Natalie inelegantly. "She said we were all a lot of shallow, callous, social butterflies and——"

"I know, I know!" said Judith, with an uplifted hand.

This teapot tempest was the last result of the Lee-Meryon entanglement; the ultimate ripple, as one may say, spreading from that calamitous

disturbance of the social waters. Cecilia did not sue for a divorce. . . . "Though I would probably have *other chances* if I did—if I were legally free, I mean, you know," she would explain in practical vein, at the same moment that she exhaled a pensive and romantic breath. "If some fine, *strong* man came into my life, *perhaps*— But most of the time I feel as if I could never trust one of them again. I only want to gather up the broken pieces of my life and go on the best I can," Cecilia said, visibly relishing this plaintive and noble statement; sometimes she said "shards" instead of "pieces" with a rather striking effect. "The broken shards, you know. And as long as John is single, there doesn't seem to be any *point* in my marrying again—only I've sometimes wondered how *he'd* take it—how it would make him feel? I don't know what I'd do if I heard from him—if he wanted me to take him back, you know. I don't believe I could bring myself to do it, I don't even know whether I could go through such an experience; if he were to come to see me or even write, I mean. It seems as if it might kill me. I hope and pray he won't ever. As Dagmar Lipschutz says: '*One doesn't want to die twice!*' It's in that last book of hers, '*The Hot Winds*'; you've read it, haven't you? Don't

you think it's perfectly *wonderful*? She has the most tremendous mentality. Its full—just *full* of truth and poetry and—and passion, you know, and subtlety. It makes me think of my own life all the time I'm reading it. I get into a perfect *rage* with the people who call it indecent—there was actually some talk of suppressing it, you know. I always say that I know it's not nice or pretty, but it's *Art!*'

Possibly Cecilia, for all her disclaimers, cherished in some secret corner of her mind, and almost unknown to herself, a certain willingness to see her ex-husband or hear from him; it would entail an emotional thrill, and she could fancy herself being magnanimous, personally desirable, melting yet mournfully distant all at once or *seriatim*—as it were—with equal satisfaction for every advantage of the situation would be with her in any case. However, nothing of the kind came to pass. The only person who ever had any reliable news was Mrs. Stevens, a year or so later. It came casually, a few lines in a letter from young Harkness; addressed to her, it was actually much more interesting to Natalie, discussing friends and concerns of their own with allusions and intimate catchwords more or less obscure to her mother. Jack had dutifully re-

joined his legation at Madrid months before, but it appeared he had run up to Paris for an outing. “ ‘. . . You’ve heard that ancient one about seeing everybody in the world pass by, if you just stood still and waited for them in the Place Vendôme?’ ” he wrote. “ ‘Well, it came true for me the other day; and that was the first time, for I never met a soul I knew in the Place Vendôme before, unless by appointment! It was coming out of the Bankers’ Trust; I ran right into your cousin, Mr. Meryon. He was just strolling along—nothing to do, I suppose—and seemed glad to see me. We had a little talk; he asked about you. . . . They have rooms only a step from there, around the corner in the Rue Duphot, one of those places with shops in front on the street, and you go back in the courtyard and ring the concierge’s bell, you know. Very quiet, considering the neighborhood, with dozens of hotels all over, every one full of Americans. I went to see them Saturday. . . .’ ”

Mrs. Stevens uttered an exclamation. “*Went to see!*” Well, of course, *he* could. A *man*——” she added philosophically, fixed her eyeglasses and went on reading. “ ‘It’s on the *entresol*, but no private hall, you go right into the salon. The maid was a Breton by her looks, and didn’t know

much, or else was simply loutish the way those Breton servants generally seem to be, for she took my card and fairly *shooed* me into the room without any preliminaries. '*Un monsieur!*' she bawled in a great loud voice, as if we had all been deaf, and with that scuttled off, knocking into the chairs and things. . . . It's just a furnished apartment, I think, not particularly attractive—not like yours, for instance. There were flowers around. . . .'

"Yes, she would have flowers," Mrs. Stevens said aloud, but to herself. "They were both sitting there. She looks about the same, only older. It surprised me at first—to see her so much older looking, I mean. There was a table with a lamp and writing things, and she was sitting by it, but not writing. . . .'" Mrs. Stevens paused.

"She wouldn't have anybody to write to," said Natalie.

"I suppose not," said her mother, after an instant. She resumed: "'I said something apologetic about breaking in so unceremoniously, but I don't think she really minded at all. He was at another table with some cards, playing solitaire. . . .'"

